

Emmanuel: Fully Known, Fully Loved
Matthew 1:18-23

The Bible gives God many glorious names to describe His incomparable character: Creator... Almighty... Shepherd... King of Kings... Lamb of God, Lion of Judah... Jehovah Jireh, to name a few.

At Christmas we especially love the names tied to the coming of Jesus: Wonderful Counselor... Mighty God... Prince of Peace... Jesus (Savior)... Christ (the promised Messiah)... Son of David... or one of my favorites, the Sunrise from on high.

But the Gospel of Matthew zeroes in on one name that I want to suggest powerfully sums up why the eternal Son left heaven, was born on earth, and was laid in a manger. The angel said to Joseph about the virgin-born Son of God:

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).” Matthew 1:22-23

Not God above us.
Not God against us.
Not God waiting for us to climb high enough.

God with us — in the mess, in the tears, in the ordinary, broken stuff of real life.

As, my friend Justin Jeppeson explained, Emmanuel not only sums up what Christmas is all about, but “God with us” is the central theme of scripture from Eden to the New Jerusalem.

One theologian capture it beautifully: "When we sing 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, we stand in three periods: the Old Testament longing for Christ's first coming, the New Testament rejoicing in it, and the church's expectancy for His final advent. O come, O come, Lord Jesus. Come soon."

Main idea: Emmanuel left heaven's throne to prepare a place for us at His table—so that broken sons of men could become beloved sons of God, welcomed to know Him, be known by Him, and invite others to the feast.

This morning we're going to linger on that beautiful name — Emmanuel — and see that everything Christmas tells us boils down to what this name promises.

1. Through Emmanuel We Can Know God

First, through Emmanuel we can truly **know** God—not as a distant force thundering from a mountain, but as a Father whose heart has been perfectly unveiled in the face of Jesus.

Under the old covenant, God spoke from a burning bush to Moses, thundered from a smoke-engulfed mountain where no one could draw near without risking death, and dwelt behind a thick curtain in the temple that only one priest could enter once a year—and even then with fear and trembling.

People knew God was powerful and holy. They just weren't sure He was personally knowable.

Then Christmas happened: the Word became flesh. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

Jesus is the unveiling. If you want to know what God is like, look at the One who touched lepers, ate with outcasts, wept at a graveside, and washed dirty feet.

Charles Spurgeon said:

"The great God who fills heaven and earth became a little child so that He might be seen with human eyes, handled with human hands, and

heard with human ears. In Jesus, God has come as near to us as He possibly could without consuming us.”

Christmas means the God who once thundered from a mountain has descended in the flesh so that we can come out of hiding and walk in His light. His name is Emmanuel.

But this knowing isn’t possible apart from the cross.

That’s what sin did from the start—it drove us into hiding. Think of Adam and Eve: scrambling to sew fig leaves, ducking behind bushes, suddenly afraid of the God who they had once loved walking with in the cool of the garden evening. But right there, in the middle of the curse, God gave the first gospel promise: the Seed of the woman would one day crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15).

Jesus is that promised Seed.

Emmanuel didn’t come just to reveal God—though He did that perfectly. He came to reconcile us to God, to pay for the sin that separated us, that sent us running and hiding.

He lived the perfectly righteous life none of us could live.

Then, on the cross, He willingly took the sinner’s death we deserved—bearing our shame by being stripped naked on a tree so we would never need fig leaves again; forsaken by the Father so that we could be brought near forever.

All who believe in Him—trusting not in their own goodness but in His finished work—are clothed in His righteousness, adopted as beloved children, and welcomed back into the garden of God’s presence.

No more hiding.

No more fear.

Just intimate, eternal fellowship.

That’s why eternal life itself is knowing Him.

Jesus prayed in John 17:3: “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Eternal life isn’t merely a ticket out of hell or a future address in heaven—it’s the restored relationship, the intimacy Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before sin broke everything. It’s walking with God again, talking with Him, delighting in Him as your greatest treasure.

And this is only possible because the Son of God didn’t just reveal God—He reconciled us to God through His blood. His name is Emmanuel—God with us, God knowable, God offering the greatest gift of all: Himself, purchased for us at the cross, so that we can come out of hiding and walk with Him forever.

2. Through Emmanuel We Can Be Known by God

Secondly, through Emmanuel we can be known by God—fully seen in every hidden corner of our hearts, every unfiltered fear and shame, and yet loved with an everlasting, unrelenting love that refuses to let us go.

You, know, we live in the most photographed, filtered generation ever, yet many today have never felt more unknown.

Driving to Nashville a few weeks ago, I was scanning the radio and came across an older Brad Paisley song titled “Online” that captures this perfectly. The guy in the song admits he’s unmotivated and uninteresting in real life... then escapes online into a version of himself he’s proud of.

And the chorus sums up the truth so many feel today:

“I’m so much cooler online.”

We smile because it’s clever... or maybe frown because the pastor is listening to bad country music. But we also nod because it hits uncomfortably close to home.

We crop the bad angles, delete the messy moments, chase the likes and the hearts... because deep down we're terrified that if anyone saw the unedited version—the insecurities, the failures, the 2 a.m. regrets—they would unfollow us in real life.

Here's what makes Christmas stunningly good news: the God who made the galaxies already saw the unedited you... and that's precisely why He came.

A thousand years before Bethlehem, David wrote Psalm 139:

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me!...Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether...Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...” Psalm 139:1-6

David isn't bragging about being lovable. He's in awe that a holy God sees every dark corner and hasn't destroyed him.

The New Testament is clearer: what God saw was rebels, enemies, spiritually dead people running the opposite direction (Romans 5:8–10; Ephesians 2:1–3).

Yet while we were still sinners, Emmanuel was born.

The 19th century preacher, Octavius Winslow beautifully expressed:

“Christ took your cup of grief, your cup of the curse, pressed it to His lips, drank it to its dregs, then filled it with His sweet, pardoning, sympathizing love, and gave it back to you to drink, and to drink forever!”

Mephibosheth tasted something of this grace centuries earlier. When King Saul and his son Jonathan died, the throne passed to David—and in those days, the remaining family of the old king often lived in fear for their lives, expecting the new king to wipe them out. Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, was crippled and hiding in exile, certain that David would hunt him down and kill him. Instead, David sought him out, and said to him, “Don't be afraid...” and then

promised, he will always eat at the royal table “as one of the king’s sons” (2 Samuel 9). Fully known, fully loved—no more hiding required.

But years later, the story takes a painful turn. After Absalom’s attempt to overthrow King David, the king finally returns to Jerusalem. Mephibosheth comes to meet him—listen to how he’s been living in 2 Samuel 19, starting in verse 24:

“And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king... He had neither cared for his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety.”

Mephibosheth explains he was betrayed by his servant Ziba, who slandered him to David. But David, unsure whom to believe, decides to split the land between them.

Then in verse 29, the king says, *“Why speak any more of your matters? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land.”*

Now here’s Mephibosheth’s incredible response—listen to this:

“Oh, let him take it all, since my Lord the king has come safely home.”
2 Samuel 19:30

He didn’t need land, title, or applause—because he had been fully known and fully loved by the king. He could release every earthly blessing because he had already been lavishly graced—first by David, and through David’s kindness, he had glimpsed the even greater heart of God, a grace that sought him in his brokenness and declared that God’s steadfast love was enough.

Beloved, that is our story too.

Jesus Himself painted a beautiful picture of this same watchful, lavish care. He pointed to wild lilies blooming in lonely fields where no gardener cared for them and few eyes would ever see:

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28–29).

That image of the lilies has stayed with me for years. In fact, the Lord used those words of Jesus—along with the almost-forgotten ‘lily-work’ crafted on the tops of Solomon’s temple pillars, where no one would ever climb to see—to shape a new book I’ve written called *Lily-Work: Crafting a Beautiful Life for God’s Eyes Alone*.

Lord willing, it will be in print and available before Easter. But one line from the book that keeps coming back to me this Christmas season is this:

“Your security is not in being needed. Your security is in being known by God.”

That’s the freedom Emmanuel gives us—the joy of being fully seen, no filters, and fully loved anyway.

God clothes the lilies of the field with glory no king could match—and many of those flowers bloom unseen by any human eye. If He cares that much for what no one notices, how much more does He see you—every hidden fear, every secret shame, every quiet longing—and love you with an everlasting love?”

This Christmas, Emmanuel isn’t just wincing at your brokenness—He’s the Rescuer who entered the mess, carried you out, washed you clean, adopted you, and now looks at the real you—no filters, no performance—and says with a smile, ‘I know you completely. And you belong to me forever.’

3. Through Emmanuel We Make Him Known

Lastly, through Emmanuel we are sent to **make Him known**—because once you’ve been found by “God with us,” you can’t keep it to yourself. Like the shepherds that first Christmas night, we become

living announcements that the God who came near is still drawing broken, ordinary people to Himself.

Think about that first Christmas night.

These shepherds were blue-collar nobodies — rough, overlooked men spending another cold night in the fields with smelly sheep. No status. No platform. No one expecting God to show up to them first.

Yet the sky explodes with glory. An angel appears and says to them:

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” (Luke 2:10–11).

Then the heavenly host joins in: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” Luke 2:14

The message wasn’t just information — it was an invitation.

God didn’t send the announcement to Caesar in Rome or Herod in Jerusalem. He sent it to shepherds in a field — ordinary people like us — because Emmanuel had come for everyone.

And what did they do?

Luke says they hurried off, found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger, and then “spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed” (Luke 2:17–18).

They became the first evangelists of Christmas — rough voices telling anyone who would listen that God had come down, wrapped in rags, sleeping in a feeding trough.

When you’ve been truly found by Emmanuel, (fully known and fully loved) you become a living announcement that God is still with us — in hospital rooms and kitchen tables, in broken marriages and busy workplaces, in quiet mornings and crowded Christmas gatherings.

Spurgeon said:

“This is the gospel in a nutshell — God has come to live with man so that man may learn to live with God. The distance is abolished; the great gulf is bridged.”

That’s why we join the angels in singing “Glory to God in the highest!” at the top of our lungs—through carols, through lives of praise. That’s why we give thoughtful gifts, open our tables to lonely neighbors, text old friends we haven’t spoken to in years, and go out of our way share the hope of Christ.

We’re echoing the shepherds and the angels who joyfully proclaimed the “Good news of great joy!” God is with us — and He’s looking for more people to sit at His table.

Living in the Wonder of Emmanuel

Again, David once sought out a crippled, fearful man hiding in exile and said, “You will always eat at my table like one of the king’s sons.”

Mephibosheth was given a permanent seat—not because he earned it, but because the king delighted to show kindness.

Jesus, our greater David, has done infinitely more. With His own blood He purchased a place for us at His table—forever. But He doesn’t make us wait for heaven to taste it.

Right now, Emmanuel stands at the door of our lives and knocks (Revelation 3:20). He longs to come in, to dine with us—to speak, to listen, so that we fall at His feet in worship and rise again transformed by His presence. This is what we were made for: daily, unhurried communion with the God who is with us.

Are we opening that door every morning, every evening, every ordinary night? Are we pulling up a chair, quieting our hearts, and letting Him feed our souls with His Word and Spirit?

And here's the beautiful overflow: when we have been found at His table, fully known and fully loved, we can't keep it to ourselves. We become the ones who seek out today's Mephibosheths—the broken, the hiding, the ashamed—and say through our words and lives, “There's room for you too. Come eat at the King's table.”

And as we love them the way He has loved us, His love flows through us and, astonishingly, we come to know the depth of His love even more.

This is the wonder of Emmanuel—not just a name we celebrate at Christmas, but a life we live every day.

So here's the Christmas question:

- Do you know Him, or are you still trying to climb to a God who feels far away?
- Have you let Him rescue you, so that you are now fully known and fully loved as a child of God?
- And if you have tasted that Emmanuel is real, who needs to hear from your lips this year that God is still with us?

Conclusion

Let me close with a story that has stayed with me for years.

There's an old legend about a young Native American boy on the cusp of manhood. As part of his tribe's “rite of passage”, his father leads him deep into the forest at dusk, blindfolds him, and seats him alone on a tree stump. The rule is clear: He must sit there through the entire night, without removing the blindfold or crying out for help, until the first rays of morning sunlight shine through. Only then can he return home—as a man.

The boy is terrified. In the pitch black, every rustle of leaves sounds like a prowling animal. Every snap of a twig feels like danger closing in. The wind howls, the cold seeps in, and waves of fear crash over him hour after hour. He fights the urge to rip off the blindfold, to run, to hide deeper in the shadows. But he stays. He endures the long, lonely night, convinced he is utterly alone.

Finally, as the horizon begins to glow, the first warm rays of sunlight filter through the blindfold. Trembling with relief, he pulls it off... and there, just feet away, sitting silently on another stump, is his father.

His father had never left. He had been watching over him the entire night—vigilant, protective, close enough to shield him from any real harm.

Church, that's Emmanuel. In our darkest nights—the nights where shame keeps us hiding, where fear makes us feel abandoned, and the shadows seem endless—we sit blindfolded by our circumstances, convinced we're facing it all alone.

But the Sunrise from on high has come. Jesus entered our forest, endured the deepest darkness on the cross, and rose to prove that God is with us. Always watching. Always near. Fully knowing every fear, every hidden corner... and loving us still.

This Christmas, you don't have to spend one more night on the stump alone. Remove the blindfold. Step into His light. Let Him reveal what you've hidden—not to shame you, but to heal you. Because the Father has been there all along, whispering, "I know you completely. And you are Mine."

Beloved, He was laid in a manger, so He can prepare a place for us in His Father's house. The tomb is empty—because He's alive. His name is still Emmanuel, and He is with us right now.

So let us live to know Him deeply... to rest in being known and loved by Him... and to spend our lives making Him known everywhere we go.