Jesus Our Immanuel — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 1:18–25 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, December 25, 2022 · *Standalone Sermons — 2022*

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Thank you, Russell, and thank you, Mary. On Christmas Day, one of the great gifts that God gives is a short sermon, so we're not going to spend a whole lot of time this morning. I know we've got kids in the sanctuary, and just wanted to spend a little bit of time reflecting really on one word. And it's mentioned in the passage that we read. If you were going to deeply understand just one word, I wonder what word you would pick. Would it be— I guess if you're a politician, maybe your word would be politics.

If you were single, maybe your word would be dating. If you're a man, your word would be woman. You really want to understand how women work. If you're a woman, your word would probably not be men—we're not too complicated—but it'd be something else. What would your word be? I don't know, but I think one of the most important words that we could probably spend a lifetime exploring and understanding deeply is the word Immanuel, which means "God with us." We just read it there in Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 to 25.

And since we just read the passage, I'm not going to read it again, but I do want us to focus on verse 23, where it says, "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which is translated 'God is with us,'" which is a fulfillment of a prophecy that was given in Isaiah chapter 7. Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel." Immanuel—God is with us. What does it mean?

And how should it change our lives? That's what I'd like us to look at this morning. And I really don't aim to be too creative. I just want us to break it down: that Jesus is God, Jesus is

God with, and then finally, Jesus is God with us. I think we take it for granted that when we say Jesus is God, it's just kind of like, if you grew up in a Christian home, "Yes, he's the Son of God." But for the mind of a first-century Jewish person, the idea that any human being—anyone with flesh on them— could be anything close to divine was a shocking and scandalous thought.

And so when it comes into the New Testament, you have these twelve disciples who are all very Jewish claiming and preaching and dying horrific deaths with the message that Jesus is God. It's a pretty profound situation. There are four main passages in the New Testament that address the deity of Jesus. The big four we learned in seminary, and we had to memorize all of them. The first one was John chapter 1, verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word"—it's the word *logos*—"and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Contrary to what a lot of Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons believe, where they say it's "a god," he's not a god, he's *the* God, the only God that exists. Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 says Jesus is "the image"—or the icon—"of the invisible God," meaning he's the exact representation of who God is. He says the same thing—or a different author says the same thing—in Hebrews 1, verse 3, unless you think the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, which you can think that. You have the right to be wrong. But different author, Hebrews 1: Jesus is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."

That word "imprint" is where we get our English word character, meaning you've got God—If you want to know what God is like, what he looks like, what he acts like and sounds like then look at Jesus because he is the exact imprint of his nature. And then finally, the last one's Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 6, which says that even though Jesus was in the form of God, or even though he was God, he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself." So these are explicit references in the New Testament, not the only ones, but the big major ones, addressing the fact that Jesus is God.

And it's not just his disciples that believe this. Jesus himself knew he was God. His self-understanding was mind-blowing. And you had to imagine, if you were Jesus and you're born into this world, and then you come to understand that you are the fulfillment of all of these prophecies in the Old Testament and that you had this unique relationship with God and that you were in fact one with the Father. You're part of that Trinitarian dance. His human mind coming to understand those things—really quite fascinating. And you see him in the New Testament coming to own this identity when he would do things like forgive people of sins.

It made the Pharisees really upset, the religious leaders: "Who are you to forgive sins? That's blasphemy. No one can forgive sins except God alone." It'd be kind of like if me and Audra were walking down the street and some—I don't know—a little old lady was walking on the side of the road and I went up and I just smacked her upside the head. You know—first off, I

would never do that, but let's imagine that I did. And that lady looks at me, shocked and in horror, and Audra says, "It's okay, hon, I forgive you."

She would say— Well, what would that little old lady say? She would say, "You don't have any right to forgive him for what he did. He sinned against me." The only person who could forgive me would be her or God alone, and that's what the Pharisees are saying. When Jesus forgives people of sins: "Who are you to forgive people of sins? That's a right that belongs to God alone." That's Luke 5:21. Another example where Jesus shows that he understands himself to be God is Matthew 14, verse 33, several other passages as well.

But people begin to worship him. And what does Jesus do? He doesn't tell them, "Stop worshiping me, I'm just a man," or "I'm just a god." He accepts the worship, because he knew that he was God. It was his self-understanding, and then it was his disciples' understanding—and a mind-blowing thing for a first-century Jewish person to believe and yet they worshipped him, they preached his divinity, and they died horrific and painful deaths because they wouldn't abandon their belief that Jesus was divine. And maybe the most fascinating thing about the divinity of Jesus is that even his own family believed that he was God.

There's, like, people who believe in and worship Elvis, but I know one person who isn't worshiping Elvis is his mother, or his brothers or sisters, because anybody who lives with you gets to see you, warts and all, right? You know their inadequacies and weaknesses. And yet with Mary, at the very end she's at the cross and she recognizes the deity of Jesus. And James, his brother, writes a book in the New Testament pointing to the divinity of Jesus. He recognized Jesus was God. He was who he claimed to be. He is who his disciples believed him to be.

He's who his family knew him to be. He is God the Son. But he's not just God. He is God with. Even the word incarnation illustrates the fleshly nature of Christmas. You know the word *carne*. It's the Spanish word for meat. Well, he took on meat. The incarnation is Jesus who is God taking on flesh. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Now a lot of people get confused on this.

What does it mean that Jesus became human? Was he— Did he subtract his divinity? I don't think the way to think about it is subtraction. Jesus didn't subtract anything from his nature. What he did is he added to his nature. Before the incarnation, you might think of Jesus in this Trinitarian dance with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. They were united in this dance of love and unity and communion. And then Jesus, in obedience to the will of the Father, enters into this world. He takes on human flesh.

He adds it to himself. And in doing so, he did empty himself, but he didn't empty himself of divinity. We just read in Philippians chapter two that he emptied himself, he took the form of a servant, but he didn't empty himself of divinity. What he emptied himself of is the glory and the exaltation that divinity demands. You might think of it this way, he intentionally refused to avail himself of these divine attributes. And so as divine, Jesus had perfect knowledge, yet in his human state he sought the will of the Father.

He sought to learn. He had to grow in wisdom and stature in all things. As divine, he's omnipotent. He doesn't need anything to do anything because he has all power. But in his humanity he's got to take a nap from time to time. He's got to go to sleep. As God, he is all good and yet embodied, he had to be made perfect through his obedience to the Father in all things. He didn't empty himself of divinity, but he emptied himself of the glory, privilege, and exaltation that divinity warrants. And that's the glorious reality of Christmas, that the eternal God in all of his majesty infinitely greater than all of the universe, put himself into an eternal form of withness.

Which is so crazy, because everywhere else that God becomes with in the Old Testament, people have a bad day when he shows up to be with. Isaiah chapter 6, he says, "Woe is me, I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips." When he goes with Moses up on the mountain when he receives the Ten Commandments, it's such a traumatic experience. Moses has to wear a towel over his face for several days because that experience changed him and not in a fun way but in a traumatic way. When God is with in the Old Testament, it's in tornadoes and hurricanes and all of these big storms that happen.

But now God becomes with in the New Testament in the person of Jesus. And it's not a storm or a hurricane or a tornado or anything like that. It is a baby—vulnerable, soft, unimpressive. The God on whom the universe depends became dependent. The one who sustains the universe by the word of his power is now being sustained by his mother's milk. An incredible contrast. All of that so that God becomes with us and with us in a permanent vulnerable way. And that doctrine, the incarnation, the doctrine of Christmas, is maybe the most comforting doctrine in all of Christianity.

That we don't have a high priest in Jesus who's unable to sympathize with us in our own sufferings and weaknesses, but we have someone who's been tempted in every way that we've been tempted. He's been tested and tried and pushed to the limits, just like each of us in this room have been tested and tried and pushed to the limits. He knows what it's like to be human. He knows what it's like to lose a loved one. He knows what it's like to feel the pressure of relational strain and trying to manage a group of people, or in our case, a family who's just out of control and at odds with each other.

He knows the stress and anxiety of those things, which means he understands what you're going through, because Jesus became with us. He's God with us. We never have to feel alone

again. Never again do we have to feel like nobody understands. Never again do you have to feel like an orphan because he's our everlasting father. And I know in a day like today, especially Christmas, some of us are suffering silently, going through things you don't want to talk about because it feels like this is not the time to bring it up.

But you have a God who knows and sees and understands that suffering and he is with you alongside of you in that hardship. He is God, yes, omnipotent, all-knowing, creator and sustainer of the universe. He is Lord of all, and yet he is also with—comes alongside in love and patience and kindness, faith and stability, with steady arms. He can identify with us, because he has been us. Now how do we respond to that? I think the invitation of Christmas is to a couple of things. One, recognize that he's God with.

But number two, to give thanks to the Father for sending the Son and to be amazed by what he had to go through to become God with us. He had to claw through heaven. He emptied himself. He took on flesh. You might think of it this way: whatever it is that we have to do to be with Jesus—which for some of us is like getting up an hour early or taking some time out of our work day and leveraging it for communion with Jesus or maybe you skip your lunch break and you spend some time fasting—that's a sacrifice, absolutely.

We have to make sacrifices to be with Jesus. But whatever it costs us to be with him, it's nothing compared to what it costs him to be with us. And that's the invitation of Christmas. It's an invitation to respond to the withness of God by making those sacrifices yourself to be with him. Look at what he's done to draw near to you. What will you do to draw near to him? John Stott says anybody who ever met Jesus Christ only ever had three responses. They were either terrified and wanted to run away, they hated him and wanted to kill him, Or number three, they worshipped him, got down on their knees, and they gave him everything.

That's the only reasonable response. If Jesus really is God, and he really is God with, then it demands our heart, our soul, our life, and our all. So he's God, he's God with, and then finally he is God with us. So who's the "us"? Well, "us" is not everybody. It doesn't say he's God with everybody. He says he's God with us. You remember when the angels announced to the shepherds, "Peace on earth"—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace" to who? "To the people he favors." So there is this narrow exclusivity to Christmas that is annoying to secular people in our culture who think that we should all just, you know, get along and God loves everybody the same.

But the truth of the New Testament is that God is not on good terms with everyone. Not everyone is a child of God. There is something that needs to happen before he can become God with you. John chapter 1, verses 11 and 12 says that Jesus came to his own, but his own people didn't receive him. But to the ones who did receive him, he gave to them the right to become children of God—those who believe in his name. Even in our text in Matthew chapter 1, verse 21, it says, "He will save his people from their sins."

And so is he God with you? That's the question you need to ask yourself, and how he becomes God with you is that you receive him. You believe on his name. Some kind of transaction needs to take place where you repent of your sin and you put your faith in him. You respond to him in light of who he actually is. You might think of it this way: the gift of God with us is universally offered, but it is narrowly applied. Christmas is exclusive. In the New Testament, Christmas comes to the shepherds.

It comes to the humble people. It comes to the magi, who will seek after the gift of the promise. It comes to people like Joseph and Mary, who believed by faith, even though it was challenging. Joseph, who didn't just believe in his heart, but he demonstrated that faith with obedience and staying with Mary and not being with her until the child had come. That's how God becomes with you: it's repentance and it's faith. It's recognizing, "God, I can't, but you can. I was wrong, but you're right." Faith is what brings the gifts of Immanuel into your life.

Faith is trusting God enough to do what He says. As fully God, Jesus was able to pay the eternal penalty for our sins. Finite human beings would never be able to atone for the infinite offense that we've committed against a holy God. But as fully human, Jesus is our advocate. He is uniquely equipped to be our representative and substitutionary sacrifice. As one old church father put it, "What is not assumed cannot be redeemed." And so Jesus had to assume our flesh so that he could redeem our flesh. One of the quotes that I love that kind of puts this into perspective is that Jesus, who was the Son of God, became a son of man, so that we sinful men and women could become sons and daughters of God.

And the invitation is open to all of us. And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, the invitation for you is to recognize Jesus is God. He is your Creator and Maker. He is the one before whom you will stand and give an account someday. But he's not a God who just stands up in heaven ready to judge you. He's a God who loves you enough that he came down to rescue you, to pull you up out of the pit, and the invitation is open to you to receive his salvation.

All that's necessary for you to do is to do what Joseph and Mary did to repent and believe, to recognize he is who he said he is, and he did what he said he would do, and that he can save you if you'll just believe. And so if you're here this afternoon and you've not made that decision, we're going to have a time for you to respond. The altar will be open and you can come and pray, and I'll be happy to receive you and work with you through that decision.

For the rest of us this morning who are believers, this Christmas day we're going to be taking the Lord's Supper. And in the Lord's Supper, the Scripture encourages us to examine ourselves, to judge ourselves so that we might not be judged. And as we take the Lord's Supper, we could be reminded that we're taking the body of Jesus Christ when we eat that bread. And we're drinking the blood of Jesus Christ when we drink this juice. It's of course

symbolic, it doesn't literally become the blood and flesh of Jesus. But it is a powerful way for us to experience the incarnation of Jesus.

The body was broken for us. He suffered for us. He identifies with us in our suffering. So maybe as you take the Lord's Supper, you would be encouraged in your heart and give thanks to the Lord for being with you in the valley low. Maybe as you drink the juice, you would be reminded that he has shed his blood for the forgiveness of your sins. And maybe you came in here with some tension in a relationship or there's some anxiety that is sinful and unholy and needs to be addressed. There are some lifestyle choices that maybe you've been secretive about.

No one else knows, but you know God knows. And as you drink the cup, you would ask the Lord to cleanse you, forgive you of that sin. Confess that sin to the Lord. Allow him to forgive you of that sin and to cleanse you of unrighteousness. For some it's a simpler act of obedience. It's just believing God enough to do what he says. And as we take the Lord's Supper this morning, you can be encouraged that you can trust him, even if doing that thing is a hard thing. Because he was faithful to come down to earth to do all the things that he did.

If you can trust him to love you that much, you can trust him enough to sustain you through the next steps of your obedience. Whatever that may be, whether it's related to your workplace or your marriage or dating or whatever the case may be. So as we take the Lord's Supper this morning, let us do so as people who are fully surrendered and fully aware that Jesus is our Immanuel. He's God with, and He's God with us through repentance and faith, in his person and his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time in your word.

And we do pray now as we take the Lord's Supper that you would use it as a special time on this Christmas day to wake us up to the reality of who Christ is. To wake us up to the reality that He is divine, He is worthy of all of our affection and worship, and that He is God with, which means He sympathizes with us in our pain and suffering, and he comes near, sits beside us, acts as an advocate, so that even now as we pray, we pray to someone who hears us and acts in accordance with our prayers because our great high priest is making intercession for us.

As we respond now through the Lord's Supper, would you, in a spiritual way, through your Holy Spirit, moving us to be fully surrendered and fully obedient to what you're calling us to do as people and as a church. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to ask a handful of our ushers if they'll come down to the front. I know we don't have all of our deacons here, so if you see it's sparse, we need about three on this side and four on this side. If we don't have three or four, just get up out of your seat and come on down.

All right, looks like we're staffed. As we pass out the elements, I invite you to remain in an attitude of prayer and introspection. If there is a spiritual decision you want to make this morning, you can come down to the front during this time, and I'd be happy to speak with you about that decision or pray with you. But let's respond to the Lord as he leads.

[Music]

I'd like to read from Luke's Gospel, chapter 22, when Jesus is having that final Passover meal with his disciples, which in doing so really redefined the Passover meal and we now celebrate it as the Lord's Supper.

It says, "When the hour came, he reclined at the table, and his apostles were with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you that I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, 'Take this and divide it amongst yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and he gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup, after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.'" And in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, "As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." And God's people said—