

And from the book of Revelation – And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling (tabernacle) of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21.3-4).

John F Walvoord comments, “The final revelation from heaven states that God will then dwell with men, that the saints will be his people and he will be their God. In eternity saints will enjoy a new intimacy with God which is impossible in a world where sin and death are still present. The new order will be without sorrow. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death with its mourning, and pain with its crying will vanish, for the old order of things will have passed away.”

w William Huelgel put it this way, “In Christ Jesus, God is with us to forgive us our sins. He is with us to give us eternal life. He is with us to send and empower us with his Holy Spirit. He is with us to give us a hope and a future. He is with us to give us joy in the midst of our sorrow. He is with us to be our guide and our peace. He is with us to be the Lord and ruler of our lives.” What are the most important things for us that Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us?

w As he commissioned them before ascending to heaven, Jesus said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt. 28.20b). His birth and earthly life was the beginning of “Immanuel time” – he is still with us! What does this mean for us in our Christian life and mission?

Study 3. Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9.6



2. Immanuel /God with us

We are being continually encouraged to look forward to some coming attraction or improvement on the present.

The trailers on the video we have just hired suggest something else we had better not miss. Products are “new, improved” or “superior.” Some even claim to be “the ultimate” – a dangerous term, since even that product will soon be superseded.

We entertain a certain euphoria, thinking that we have “come of age,” that Utopia is just around the corner.

Then again we become sceptical, having second thoughts about the direction of world history at the moment. Perhaps Utopia was in the past – in “the good old days” which people mistakenly thought of as “these trying times.” If only we could turn back the clock and regain the lost Eden.

w Pressing forward to a future Utopia... longing for the lost Eden... In what ways do we see these two in present-day society? Which one seems to predominate?

w Past... present... future... Where do we as Christians see the activity of God?

Immanuel

Read Isaiah 7.10-16

The kings of Aram (Damascus) and Israel (the northern kingdom) came together to attack Jerusalem. They were unsuccessful, but Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pilezer, King of Assyria, for help. Assyria attacked and captured Damascus.

Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria. While there he was impressed by a pagan altar he saw. He had the bronze altar in the Temple in Jerusalem moved and a pagan altar erected in its place. He used the pagan altar for offerings and sacrifices, but still sought divine guidance at the bronze altar (vv. 10-16).

The situation in Judah was not good. But it was made considerably worse by an unbelieving king who was acting out of fear.

It was in the middle of the threat from Aram and Israel that the Lord sent Isaiah the prophet to King Ahaz. The message was to “be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid” (Is. 7.4). The threat wouldn’t be fulfilled. Yet there was a warning, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (v. 9b).

And there was another message for Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign...” (v. 11). Ahaz replies, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test” (v. 12). Back in Deuteronomy 6.16, the people were instructed, “Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah” – words, in fact, which Jesus quoted back to the devil during his temptation (Mt. 4.7). The testing at Massah was a failure of the grumbling, complaining people to trust God and go forward. In refusing to ask for a sign, Ahaz wasn’t expressing godly trust but unbelief.

So the sign is given anyway – “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Is. 7.14).

The words seem to refer to something fairly immediate. The Hebrew word for “virgin” may refer to any young woman of marriageable age. “But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste” (v. 16).

Yet there was something unfulfilled in the words. Fulfilment means that something has been made complete. While there was an immediate reference in Isaiah 7.14, it hadn’t all happened just then.

When the Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, the word *parthenos* was used here – a word that unmistakably refers to a “virgin.” And the word “Immanuel” – “with-us God” – is a name that goes beyond any human child. Who might this virgin’s son be? And what human being could possibly be called Immanuel, “God with us”? Here was yet another unfulfilled thread in the Old Testament which must be pointing to God’s promised Messiah.

Read Matthew 1.18-25.

Matthew notes that “all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet” in Isaiah 7.14. At last the future component of the sign given to King Ahaz was fully coming to pass.

God was dealing with far more than the Kings of Aram and Israel. His action was far more significant than the fortunes of the rule of King Ahaz. The virgin’s Son was truly and fully Immanuel, God with us.

w Reflect on Isaiah 7.14 and Matthew 1.23 – on the immediate reference which was clearly incomplete.

w Why are these words “fulfilled” in the birth of Jesus?

God with us

The “God-with-us” theme isn’t restricted to Isaiah 7.14 and Matthew 1.23, however. We can trace it from Genesis to Revelation.

Adam and Eve were intended to live in fellowship with God (note Gen. 3.8-9). Disobedience and sin broke this relationship. Yet there remains in the human heart a yearning to know God.

When the Israelites were on their way from Egypt to Canaan, they built a tabernacle – God’s tent among their tents. In Exodus 25.8 we hear the Lord’s words of promise, “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.”

Exodus 29.44-46 – “So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”

Exodus 40.34-48 – “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out – until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.”

John’s gospel doesn’t record the events of Jesus’ birth, but says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1.1,14).

The words “made his dwelling” are literally “pitched his tent.” The Revised Version margin has “*Gk.* tabernacled.” It is in fact the same word that translates the Hebrew word for “tabernacle” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Just as God’s presence was in the tabernacle, so Jesus dwelt among us on earth.

Strikingly, v. 18 reads, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” The King James had “only begotten Son,” but most modern translations accept the better-attested reading “only begotten God” (even the New World Translation – with a small ‘g’!). Jesus was truly Immanuel, “God with us.”