



December 20, 2015

Matthew 1:18-25

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Jesus, Our Immanuel

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for downloading the podcast of this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

If you have your Bible today, I'd like you to turn with me, if you would, to the story of Christmas, Matthew chapter one. What I love about reading this story is that it is really true. Really true. Karla and I have been to Bethlehem, obviously the village has changed a bit over these 2000 years, but the hills around it are the same and you can stand there at times and really picture what it must have been like for that little village out on that little peninsula that sticks out over that valley. Today, the Church of the Nativity is built over the nativity site. Of all the holy sites that are marked by churches, this is considered to be the most accurate. It has been confirmed over and over again that this is really the spot where Jesus was born. At one time there was an inn on that site and nearby, a stable or cave where animals were kept. If you go there today, to the Church of the Nativity, three different Christian faiths and backgrounds worship on that site. It's an interesting building. When you go in, there is a new entrance, but you have to bow down to go in. It was built that way by design. You have to bow as you go in. You can't just walk in, upright, I suppose, unless you're two feet tall. You bow to go in. You go down some stairs and into a little place marked with a shrine. They pull back the curtain and there is a spot on the floor with a little glass window that you can look through and that apparently has been set apart as the place where Jesus was actually born. I remember when I was looking down there, I thought, wow, what a hallowed spot. I remember saying to one of the guides (who works at the church there), if that's where Jesus was born, where do you think they set the manger? It blew me away. He turned me around and said, you see that little alcove there behind you? History has confirmed for us, we are fairly certain, that's exactly where the manger stood where they placed Jesus after He was born. You're standing in that place! It all comes to life! This isn't just a story – it is history. It really happened.

Matthew, who knew Jesus well – can you imagine when Jesus was with His disciples, as they began to learn more and more about who He was, and the miraculous nature of where He came from, many of those late night talks – Matthew and the other disciples would have asked Him about the details: Where were You born? What was it like? Who was there? How did it happen? What did Joseph and Mary think? That's why we're not surprised that God has recorded a lot of those details for us.

But even with all these detail, sometimes people get a little confused. I was reading about a 5-year-old boy (I have a 5-year-old grandson). 5-year-olds see the world through a different set of lenses and this little boy was going around, saying that Christmas was about Jesus Christmas. Finally his parents said,

His name is not really Jesus Christmas, His name is Jesus and He is called Jesus the Christ. He said, well, His mom's name is Mary Christmas! When I read about that, I thought, how pure is that!? His mom's name is Mary Christmas, so of course His last name is Christmas! Why didn't I think of that?

Matthew records for us how the birth of Jesus came about. This is what Matthew wrote (Matthew 1:18-25)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Father, I don't know if there is a simpler story than this. Two young people from a Nazarene village, who are a part of the centerpiece of history, in the redemption of man. We've been talking a lot lately about Your identity and the Great I AM. I don't know if Your identity was ever more clearly stated than right here in the Christmas story. So today, Lord, as we open this up, may we stand in awe again and wonder, at the One who is come to be born as our Savior. We'll thank You, Father, for revealing Jesus, our Immanuel. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I've had a lot of dreams in my life, most of which I can't remember. Some of the dreams are funny. I know that, because Karla says she has heard me laughing in my sleep. Some are frustrating. Some are scary. They call them nightmares. Most dreams are like a computer download of your subconscious mind processing all that stored information. For me, most of the time my dreams are more like a computer breakdown. But for most, it's a download. Some dreams, though, have a purpose. They can even be used by God to make us aware of things that otherwise we might miss or not understand.

Such was the dream that Joseph had one night as he wrestled with what to do about a thorny dilemma. Joseph was betrothed to a village girl named Mary. Now, betrothal was as serious as a marriage. It was a contract between two families. The only thing that awaited was the final consummation on the wedding day. But when you were betrothed, the agreement was made, the contract was set, and the only way you could undo that was by a divorce. Marital faithfulness was required in this. So Joseph became betrothed to Mary. She went off to visit her relative Elizabeth, and was gone for about three months or so. When she came back, she had a belly! Joseph is thinking, *what have you done!?* What made matters worse was, Mary told Joseph that God had done it. This was a little tough to swallow, as you can imagine. It sounded like a convenient out. Joseph was a righteous man. He was a God-fearing man and he knew the law. He knew that the penalty for adultery was death by stoning. Yet, because he loved Mary and he decided he didn't want to harm her or disgrace her publicly with that whole process, he decided he would go to the family, just nullify the contract and privately withdraw before a big mess

was made of this. How many sleepless nights he wrestled with this, we have no idea. What we do know is this: when he finally made up his mind, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, don't do it! I know what you're thinking. The angel confirmed Mary's story as the truth. In fact, Matthew says in verse 20:

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph, Mary is on the level. She has been with no man. She is telling you the truth. God has done this, miraculously. I know this is a bit overwhelming, but don't be afraid. When the time comes and the baby is born, you are to give Him the name, Jesus. In fact it is written in the imperative. There was no indecision about this; the angel said to him, "You WILL name Him Jesus." Matthew then confirms that all of this was to confirm what God had said over 700 years earlier through the prophet Isaiah. (1:22):

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

In that one dream, God not only calmed Joseph's heart, but God revealed to him that this baby in Mary's womb was no ordinary child. He would be the long-awaited Messiah. This baby would be God in human flesh. This child was going to be our Savior. He was going to be God with us. As Matthew reminds us in the Christmas story, the good news of Christmas is, that Jesus is our Immanuel.

What does that mean? Jesus is God our Savior (the angel told Joseph); and Jesus is God with us.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is God our Savior. Matthew wrote it like this (vs 18-21)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Apparently in Sweden, I've read, that if you choose a name for your child and the government determines that the name you've chosen could cause ridicule or harm or emotional distress to the child down the road, they have the right to intervene and change the name. I didn't know this. I was reading about it. If this is true, there are a few names I have heard of that maybe it would have been good to have changed. But anyway, this one family in Sweden (I read in this article) wanted to name their little boy Superman. It said, Swedish tax authorities thought that it would make it hard for the kid and he'd be picked on, so they declined a request by Sarah Leisten to name her newborn son after the superhero." It said, "

The officials were following legislation giving them veto power over names. So they nixed the name 'Stehlman' (sp), which is the Swedish word for Superman, citing it as potential to attract ridicule later in life. The decision prompted complaints of 'inconsistency in applying the law.'

Previously names such as Batman, Tarzan and Bevin (after a soccer star) have been permitted. So why not Superman? The boy's parents wanted this name, they said, because when their son was born he had one arm pointing skyward like he was in a Superman position. Leisten plans to re-apply, this time with the name 'Stehlmannen')(sp).

I don't know how to pronounce the Swedish, although my mother-in-law could help me, but supposedly it is changed slightly to 'The Superman' so our boy, 'The Superman' instead of his name being Superman. The article said, "If it is approved, one thing is clear, little Superman will have a name he will never be able to live up to.

When I read that I thought, names do have meaning, don't they? Sometimes we are named things we could never live up to. Take my name, for example: Lawrence Herbert. (By the way, I've always thought, I must have been a really rough delivery for someone to name me Lawrence Herbert! Who looks into a basket at some little kid and says, oh, Lawrence Herbert! It's like, what?!) Anyway, my name means "laurel-crowned one." I can assure you that is far from how people would have described me, watching me growing up. I never lived up to my name.

Joseph was told that when the time came, he was to give his son the name Jesus. I can assure you, Jesus would fully live up to the meaning of His name. On the one hand, Jesus was as common a name in Israel as our names, Bob or Bill or Larry or Tom. The name was common, but the meaning was not. 'Jesus' is the Greek form of the Hebrew word 'Joshua' (Yeshua). Both of those names mean 'Jehovah is Salvation' or 'Yahweh saves' or 'God the Great I AM is the Savior'. You get the idea. It's a powerful name. So Joseph was told that when your baby is born, you will name Him 'Jehovah is Salvation'. You will name Him that because He is going to save His people from their sins. Matthew made it clear: this child is God who saves. He is God in human flesh. Joseph, Matthew said, is not the father. In fact, when you read this section, it is very important to pay attention to the details, because in normal genealogy, Joseph would have been clearly described as the father of Jesus, but in this detail, you'll find he is consistently described as the husband of Mary, not the father of Jesus. That's because Joseph isn't the father of Jesus. God is, by the Holy Spirit.

That's why Jesus is called the Son of God, not the son of Joseph. He is the only begotten Son of God. Begotten of like-kind. Remember when we were going through the I AMs and we talked about the fact that, by calling Himself the Son of God, Jesus was declaring His deity. Kind begets kind. Dogs beget dogs. Cats beget cats, fish beget fish, humans beget humans, God begets God! There's no other choice. Remember the angel's message to Mary in Luke 1:35

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Remember Mary was overwhelmed wondering how in the world this was going to happen. I'm going to have a baby? I'm a virgin! I've been with no man. The angel answered,

The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

If any of you have ever read C.S. Lewis, many have probably read *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or *The Screwtape Letters*, or a number of his other books. He has a book called *Miracles*. When C.S. Lewis writes theological things, I have to read it 8 or 10 times to understand it! This guy's brain is like - way beyond mine (which surprises nobody), anyway. In this book, *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis wrote this about the virgin birth:

No woman has ever conceived a child, no mare a foal, without Him. [In other words, nothing is ever born into creation without God's work] But once, and for a special purpose, He dispensed with that long line which is His instrument. Once His life-giving finger touched a woman without passing through the ages of interlocked events. [In other words, not through a natural process of any kind, God did something unique. Just one time. I love this.] Once the great glove of nature was taken off of His hand.

God works in nature. C.S. Lewis described it like God's hand in nature, making things happen. He is a sovereign God. He is involved in all these things. And in the natural course of events, it is natural because God is directing. But once God decided to take his hand out of the natural course of events and do something very different with His creative hand. Amazing. There was of course a unique reason for this. This time, He was creating not simply a man, but the man who was to be Himself. Amazing!

Which is why Mary, when she learned the identity of her baby, broke out in a song that has been called the Magnificat. Luke 1:46:

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in [who?] God my Savior, [imagine that! Here's Mary, God is in my womb and He is going to be my savior!]⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

"My spirit rejoices in God my savior." God! My savior! God sent Jesus to glorify Himself and to save us. God sent Jesus to meet our deepest need. That's why the angel made sure Joseph got the message. "You will call His name Jesus." You will call His name 'Jehovah is Salvation' or 'God saves' because He will save His people from their sins.

We are learning in this beautiful Christmas musical, *Repeat the Sounding Joy*, that there is joy because God met our deepest need. Our deepest need is spiritual. Our deepest need is to have a relationship with God but that can't happen as long as sin is in our lives. Paul told the Romans in Romans 3:23, "All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All of us! There are no exceptions.

We are sinners by nature and by choice, and sin is a consequence, it pays a wage. When you sin, this is the result. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death." Separation from God. We've been learning this a lot in the I AM series. God loves us but He can't have relationship with us as long as sin remains unforgiven. God is life. To be separated from God is the very definition of death. But! The good news of Christmas is this: John 3:16 ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Sins forgiven, relationship with God, eternal life – for all who believe and receive Jesus into their life as God their savior.

Which is why the message on the night of His birth was such a message of joy for all mankind. I love the Christmas story in Luke 2. When I married into Karla's family, her dad used to read this every Christmas morning before we did anything else. It's a tradition we continue on in our family. Luke 2:8-12

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

God will be lying on a bed of hay in a basket of sticks. You go there, you're going to see Him. Good news of great joy! A savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. The name 'Christ' or 'Messiah' means the anointed one, the one mentioned of God, the one chosen of God, the one selected and set apart by God. He is Jesus Christ the Lord. The word 'Lord' ('Kurios' in Greek) is the Greek equivalent of the word 'Jehovah'. He is Christ, He is God, the Great I AM. You will give Him the name, Jesus.

It tells us in Matthew 1:24:

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

What strikes me about this Christmas story is that Mary believed the message. Joseph believed the message. A group of shepherds and some Eastern Magi believed the message. Have we believed it? Is Christmas more than just a story? Is it for each of us the good news of great joy? Jesus, God our savior has been born. Jesus is our Immanuel who came to save us from our sins.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. I can assure you nothing you might get from under any tree will ever top a gift like that.

Not only God our Savior, but the good news of Christmas is – God with us. Matthew 1:22-23:

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Roy Borgess is an ex-convict. He went to jail, deservedly so. He was a man who wrote an article when he got out called *Oh Holy Night*. It was published in *Today's Christian* magazine. I'll read you what he wrote (it's amazing to me.):

Locked behind the razor wire fences of a Florida prison is no place to spend a holiday. I spent 15 Christmases there, under these less-than-festive conditions. This year, my situation looked even bleaker. I was stuck in confinement, solitary confinement. A prison inside a prison where the supposed troublemakers were sent. In reality, anyone could find himself in "the hole" just by irritating the wrong person.

Because I was going to be locked up in a cell 24 hours a day through Christmas, I figured nothing memorable could happen. Beyond a five-minute shower three times weekly, there wasn't much to look forward to. In a way, that Christmas was like the first Christmas 2000 years ago. Most people went about their lives, paying bills, cooking dinner, travelling to and fro. A few shepherds working the late night shift got a spectacular celestial show from some angels who proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will to men!" And some wise men, Eastern Magi, had begun their journey to Jerusalem looking for someone called the King of the Jews. To the rest of the world, it was just another day. No holiday music. No discount sales. No trees with lights.

Christmas night in confinement, alone in my cell. I read in my Bible about Paul and Silas, who were also inside a prison. Despite their miserable predicament, they were praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners listened. The lights went out and I stared at the ceiling from my bunk, wondering if I could praise God in the midst of my circumstances. I could hear a

mouse nibbling at some crackers I left out for him. Then suddenly, I heard a voice come out of the vent above the toilet.

It was Andrew, in the next cell. "Merry Christmas, Roy!" he said.

"Merry Christmas, Andrew," I replied.

"You know any Christmas songs?" Andrew asked.

"Yea, I know a few."

"I'll sing one, if you'll sing one," he said.

"What shall we sing?"

Andrew began singing *Joy to the World*. He sang every verse. I sang the chorus with him. Then it was my turn. I chose *Silent Night*. Then he sang *Oh Come, All Ye Faithful*. I answered with *Felis Navidad*. I have another song, Andrew said. He started to sing *Oh Holy Night*. Silence filled the quad as everyone listened.

It was a moment I'll never forget. It not only reminded me of Paul and Silas, but it made me realize everyday is Christmas, when God has arrived. It wasn't just another day and I wasn't alone. Immanuel was in confinement with me. He was in my cell, blessing me.

God with us. Sometimes God has to get us so alone, to help us to realize we are never alone. That's what Matthew was proclaiming when he wrote this section. Matthew said, (1:22-23)

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Nobody should have missed Jesus' coming. God said in Genesis 3:15, that the messiah would be born of a woman, fully human. He said in Genesis 22 that He would be a seed of Abraham. He said in Genesis 49 He would be of the tribe of Judah. He said in 2 Samuel 7 He would be of the line of David. He said in Micah 5:2 that the blessed birth would be in the town of Bethlehem. Those particular parameters could have been fulfilled by a number of Jewish boys, who could have traced their lineage through Abraham, who could have been of the tribe of Judah, who could have been in the line of David and may have been born in Bethlehem. There is a whole bunch of boys who could have done that, but the next parameter, no one but God's Son could ever fulfill.

Matthew 1:22:23 ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

A virgin will have a baby. The prophet was Isaiah. The context in Isaiah 7 was about King Ahaz, whose kingdom was threatened by Aram and Ephraim. He was attacked. He cried out and God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell him, Ahaz, you don't have to worry. Those nations are not going to hurt you. In fact, very soon, in a short time, they are going to be destroyed. But Ahaz doubted. So God said to Ahaz through Isaiah, (7:10-16)

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶ for 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.

God said, Ahaz, if you won't ask for a sign, I'll give you one. There's a virgin, a young woman, living in your town. You know this person apparently. You know that she is a virgin. She is going to conceive and have a son (by the normal means is implied), in Ahaz's day. This virgin you know, who is now not married, is going to come and have a baby, unexpectedly. Whether she got married, or whether it was out of wedlock, I have no idea, but this virgin that no one expected to be married, is now pregnant. And she was going to have a baby, and when that gal named that baby Immanuel, which means 'God with us', God told Isaiah to tell Ahaz, when that happens, remember this: this is the sign I gave you. I'm telling you exactly what's going to happen before it happens, and when that baby is born and you call him Immanuel, before that child can reach the age of discerning right and wrong, very early on in that baby's life, you're going to see that Aram and Ephraim are going to be destroyed. They are not going to harm you. By the time that baby is old enough, they will be gone. When that happens, Ahaz, I want you to remember that Immanuel is more than just a name, God is with you! So, out of that prophecy, there was a short-term fulfillment in Ahaz's day. Miraculous as it was, it was not a virgin birth. That gal somehow got pregnant by somebody, but the sign was that all of this would happen and the name would be this, and God would deliver them. But, there was a long-term fulfillment way beyond Ahaz's day, that would come to pass literally as the prophet declared it. A virgin who had never been with a man will now conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. And when that baby is born, you will know the fulfillment of what God said. He will be Immanuel, God with us.

It's the very thing that John wrote about in his gospel. John 1:1-2, 14:18:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. [The only begotten Son, the Son who is God in human flesh.]

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) [Do you hear that? John the Baptist said, the One who comes after me is really the One who comes before me, because He has always been.]¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

He is God with us. John would end his first letter like this, reminding everyone of who Jesus is (1 John 5:20

²⁰ We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

He is the true God. God with us. And when a person trusts this Jesus, believes in Who He is, trusts in Christ's death, burial and resurrection as sufficient payment for his sin, and they open up their heart and they ask this Christ to come in, they are receiving God in all of His fullness. In fact, Paul wrote in Colossians that all the fullness and deity dwells in Christ in bodily form. The fullness of God comes to live in you. When Christ is living in you in the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, you will know the joy and peace of Immanuel. He is God with us.

People, I don't know what you are going through right now in this holiday season. I know what some of you are going through, because we're walking alongside it and praying through it with you. Maybe this Christmas finds you having the best times of your life, or maybe you are in the midst of your greatest trial. I have no idea on some of you. But I want you to know that God knows. I can assure you of this: whatever you're facing, if you have Christ, Immanuel, living in you, you will never face anything alone. In fact, sometimes, as Roy Borgess will tell you, when you think you are most alone, you discover with great joy, you are not!

God told Moses, God told Joshua, God told Israel, and God tells us, “I will never leave you or forsake you. I'll be with you always.”

Jesus is our Immanuel. He came to us so that we could come to Him. And if you have Christ in you, you're going to be with Him forever.

The whole Christmas story is miraculous, God coming to save us. It isn't just that God died on a cross for us, it's that He came at all that is miraculous. You think of where He was, and what He left to come here!

I was reading a piece by David Slagle from Decatur, Georgia. He wrote an article that caught my attention. He called it *Our Dumpster-Diving God*. I thought, boy, that's an interesting description of God! A dumpster-diving God. He said,

I meant no disrespect by it, but let me tell you what I mean. Being from the South, I love ribs. I remember hearing about this particular restaurants that had amazing ribs. A bunch of my friends and I drove 50 minutes to get there. The place was packed and the food was great. It was all-you-can-eat rib night, and the rib bones were piling up as fast as the line to get in. Eating ribs is messy business. Barbecue sauce gets on your face, your fingers, your clothes. Dirty napkins pile up next to half-eaten bowls of baked beans and coleslaw.

When our crew had eaten all we could eat, we paid our tab and waddled out to the car. That's when I reached into my pocket for my keys and came up with nothing but lint. Starting to panic, I looked through the window at the ignition. I was hoping that I had locked my keys in the car because, in the back of my mind a more disgusting possibility was taking shape. I saw that the ignition was empty, I knew exactly where my keys were, the keys to my car, the keys to my house, the keys to my office, the keys to everything.

Only seconds earlier those precious keys had slid right off my tray and followed a half-eaten corncob and several bones to the bottom of a trash can. I had thrown away my keys on all-you-can-eat rib night! It was a long walk home! My friends certainly weren't going to do my dirty work

for me, so I went out behind the restaurant, and I dove in! I fished through bones and beans, and barbecue and corn, and cake and coleslaw, and a host of saliva-soaked napkins. A shiny layer of trash-can slime was coating my arms before I finally grasped hold of those precious keys.

As I meditate on the incarnation this Christmas, I think about our dumpster-diving God. I mean no disrespect by calling Him that, on the contrary. I have a soaring adoration for this infinite God who left a pristine, sinless Heaven, to search through the filth and rubbish of this fallen world in search of something so precious, He was willing to give His life. He was searching for me.

That God who is willing to do all of that for us is Jesus, our Immanuel. God, who is our Savior, you will call His name Jesus. He is God with us. This fulfills the prophet's word, you will call Him Immanuel, which means God with us.

Matthew and the Good News of Christmas could not have been clearer. (Matthew 1:18-25)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Father, thank You for the Christmas story. It's the story of life to those of us who believe it. It's a story of hope and encouragement, no matter what we are facing. We know our greatest need has been met. He will save us from our sins. He is Jesus. He is God with us. The assurance that even when we feel most alone, we discover that we are not. You are with us always. Father, as we come to another Christmas week, may we have time to reflect on this truth. The Christmas story is true. Jesus is our Immanuel. We thank You, in Your precious name, Amen.