

Matthew 1:20-23 "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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 be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" -- which means, "God with us."

Dear People Who Worship the World's Savior:

Christine saw a flat box about the size of a notebook under the Christmas tree with her name on it. It was wrapped plainly with a few strips of tape around it. "That plain package couldn't have anything inside that I would want," she thought. It had come from a girl at Christine's former high school where she had attended for a couple of years before moving away. "I didn't really know her all that well. What would she have sent?"

As her family gathered that night, all the gifts were opened except that plain one for Christine. With her family watching in anticipation, she picked up the small, flat gift and unwrapped it. A tear formed in the corner of Christine's eye and a lump in her throat. "Look, Mom and Dad, it's last year's school yearbook -- the one we didn't have enough money to buy!" When she opened the yearbook, it was filled with all sorts of messages about how much she was missed and loved. With tears running down her cheeks, she realized how truly precious this plainly wrapped gift was -- more than all the others with all their shiny paper and bows.

Of Jesus Christ it is written, "**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him**" (Isa 53:2). Jesus came in a plain wrapper, but what a priceless treasure he is to every one of us! This Sunday before Christmas, let's learn more about this treasure as Matthew tells us about "**Great Names for the Greatest Child**" (1) **Immanuel: God with us**, and (2) **Jesus: the Lord saves**.

1

The question has been asked, "What's in a name?" And sometimes the answer is, "Not much." Most of our names are just labels our parents picked because they just like the sound of it or it was handed down generationally. There's nothing wrong w/ that, but before us today are names packed full of significance. The 1st is **Immanuel**: "**All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.'**" Do you remember what prophet wrote that? Isaiah (7:14). For over 700 years this prophecy was the topic of much debate. And now the angel was telling Joseph the centuries-old debate was over! The virgin was Mary. The child would be Mary's and Joseph's to help raise.

"**Immanuel**," Matthew explains, has a very important meaning. "El" is the Hebrew word for "God," and "Im-manu" the form for "with us." Immanu-el=With us, God! Words in the Bible aren't just tossed in there like ingredients in a salad. These words have purpose and meaning.

So what does this mean? It means Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, is also God. We call this the **incarnation**. "Carne" means flesh or meat (think of "carnivorous"). So: "God in the flesh." As John wrote: "**The Word (Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling among us.**"

The Child born in Bethlehem in a barn is much more than meets the eye. Look past the plain wrapper and what you get is true God himself, the universe's Creator! This God is "**with us**": **Immanuel**. It's a name of great hope:

- No matter how desperate the situation, Jesus, God, is with us! He is our "**ever-present help in trouble**" (Ps. 46 1).
- When disappointed or let down by people we love and depend on, God will not disappoint. He's with us.

- When lonely and wondering if anyone really even cares, or when away from family and friends at Christmas (maybe serving our nation overseas), God is with us: *Immanuel*.

2

But the angel who appeared to Joseph to calm his troubled heart had another name for this soon-to-be-born boy. He said, *“She (Mary) will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

Jesus was actually a common name in Israel. It’s the Greek form of the OT Hebrew name *Joshua* -- which means, *Yahweh* (or *Jehovah*) *saves!* **Yahweh** is an amazing name -- the name by which God revealed himself to Moses when he spoke to him from the burning bush. When Moses hesitated to lead and asked, *“Who shall I say sent me?”* God replied, *“Tell them ‘I Am’ sent you...I am that I am.”* God is the great *“I am.”*

So Jesus’ name means *“the Lord saves.”* Perfect! But save us from what? The Jews of Jesus’ day wanted to be saved from the Roman occupiers who were oppressing them. People today want to be saved from social injustice and the hassles of life. But that’s **not** what the angel said. He said, *“You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.”* It can’t be any clearer. Jesus’ whole life was about carrying out a rescue mission to save us from our sins.

We live in a time of moral relativism where people often say that nothing is truly right or wrong. The only thing that’s wrong is saying something is wrong -- as God does in the Commandments. Some people are actually offended by the confession of sins that we speak together at the beginning of our services. They say it’s a **downer** and filled with negativity.

And I agree. The confession of my sins **is** a downer. It makes me feel horrible for being the way I am, a rebellious, stubborn sinner. But it also prepares my guilty heart to receive the greatest, most uplifting news it could ever receive: the announcement that because of Jesus’ perfect life that he credited to me and because of Jesus’ sacrificial death in my place, my sins are completely forgiven and my future is bright and filled with joy! Even after I die, I live! And each and every one of us can say the same thing. So Jesus, whose name means *“The Lord saves,”* is truly my greatest gift and treasure!

Friends, it’s a good thing the angel went and talked with Joseph when he found out that Mary was expecting a child. What Joseph thought was going to ruin his life turned out to be the greatest blessing and gift that he, Mary, and the whole world has ever received. It’s good for us to remember not to judge a package by its wrapping. This Child is **Immanuel** (God with us). The Child is **Jesus** (the Lord saves). This extraordinary Child’s birth we joyfully celebrate!

Amen.