

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key verse: Isaiah 7:14

### **“O COME, O COME EMMANUEL”**

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* may be the oldest Christmas carol still sung today. The author is unknown, but he's believed to have been a priest or a monk writing before 800 A.D. He obviously had a rich knowledge of both Old and New Testaments. Originally the carol contained seven different verses, representing the different biblical views of the Messiah. One verse per day was sung or chanted during the last seven days before Christmas.

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* was first published in the 1850s in England. It's a simple, reverent tribute to the birth of Christ and to the fulfillment of God's promise to deliver His children from sin. And it is the perfect song for us to end our series as we reflect the coming of the Lord Jesus as a baby on Dec. 25.

The author of the song had in mind Isaiah 7:14 which says:

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

Immanuel is Hebrew which means “God with us”.

This prophecy was made hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and Matthew quotes it in his gospel in Matthew 1:23 to confirm that Mary's child is the Messiah. So, the Christ child would be called “Emmanuel, God with us.” And though Jesus was to be called this, it wasn't given to Him as a name. No one ever said to Jesus, “Hey, Emmanuel, how's it going today?” Emmanuel described who Jesus was and what He would accomplish. He was God who came to dwell with

humankind as a man like us. And in His arrival He met the very deepest needs of our hearts.

This morning, I want to talk about those needs and how they are met through Christ today:

***“Emmanuel” MEETS OUR NEED TO...***

**1. ...KNOW GOD AND BE KNOWN BY GOD**

What we celebrate in this Christmas season is the fact that the yearning of the Old Testament people, Israel, has been fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. God has, by the power of His Holy Spirit, broken into human history. Emmanuel has come! God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

J. B. Phillips wrote, *“We must never allow anything to blind us to the true significance of what happened at Bethlehem so long ago. Nothing can alter the fact that we live on a visited planet.”*

The God of all creation has come to recreate His creation, to redeem His creation, to make possible our wholeness of life through Jesus Christ. And I’ve got to believe that at the deepest level of every one of us there is a yearning to know this God who came to this planet in a personal way. I’ve got to believe that at the heart of every one of us is a desire to experience the reality of Emmanuel—God with us!

A freelance reporter from the *New York Times* once interviewed Marilyn Monroe. She was aware of Marilyn's past and the fact that during her early years Marilyn had been shuffled from one foster home to another. The reporter asked, "Did you ever feel loved by any of the foster families with whom you lived?"

"Once," Marilyn replied, "when I was about seven or eight. The woman I was living with was putting on makeup, and I was watching her. She was in a

happy mood, so she reached over and patted my cheeks with her rouge puff...For that moment, I felt loved by her."

As sad as that story is, it demonstrates the need we all have to be touched, to be acknowledged, and to be cared for by someone greater than ourselves. And that need is no greater demonstrated than in the need each of us have to know God and to be known by Him.

Fortunately, through the arrival of Jesus, Emmanuel, that need has been met. *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.* (1 John 5:20)

This verse was written to those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And it is written to assure us that this God whom we long to be touched by, that we long to converse with, and that we long to spend time with, has come and made Himself known to us in the fullest sense possible.

The God "up there" became the God "in our midst" and it all started on that day 2,000 years ago when a baby was born who would change the world. My concern today is for those of you who might not know God yet. The need for God is there although you may not have identified it in your own life. I'm sure it is there.

You see, God has instilled within each of us a desire to know Him intimately, and He met that need by sending His Son. He is now simply waiting for you to acknowledge Him in faith, and He will make Himself known to you.

"Emmanuel" also meets our need to

## **2. ...HAVE ALL SIN AND GUILT REMOVED**

There was a time during the most horrible persecutions of the Jews by the Nazis in Poland that an old Jewish cemetery-keeper came into the cemetery one morning and found that during the night a woman had crept into an open grave and there given birth to a son – And she had died. He found this child, and he said to himself and to others, "This must be the Messiah, for only the Messiah could choose to be born in a grave."

Well, it wasn't the Messiah; the child died before noon of that day. But the truth of which that cemetery-keeper spoke is absolutely accurate. Only the Messiah of God could choose to be born in a grave.

Meaning, only a God who loves as our God loves could come into the midst of all the pain of life and death and here bring his grace.

Jesus' birth was necessary so that in the end He could experience death for us. It is very easy to be moved by the pictures of Jesus as an infant, being held and loved by His mother. But we must remember that the infant would grow to manhood and be nailed to a Cross to meet our need to have our sin and guilt removed.

*For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. – 1 Peter 1:18-19 (NLT)*

The Christ of Christmas cannot be disassociated from the Christ of the Cross. Jesus paid the ransom price – He paid with His own blood, so that you and I could be set free from every sin we have ever committed.

*For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. – 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NLT)*

When you accepted Jesus as your Savior, He removed every sin that you have ever committed and wiped the slate clean. Our need to be able to stand before God in complete innocence and purity was met through Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. I now appear in God's eyes with the righteousness of Jesus Himself – not because of anything I have done, but because of what He has done for me.

“Emmanuel” meets our need to

### **3. ...HAVE GOD AS OUR CONSTANT COMPANION**

A couple had two boys, 8 and 10, who were always getting into trouble. The parents were certain if any mischief occurred in the community that their two young sons were involved.

They were at a loss as to what to do about their behavior. Then the mother heard about a minister who'd been successful in disciplining children, so she brought the boys to him.

The minister asked to see the boys individually, and the youngest went first. The minister sat the boy down and asked, "Where is God?" The boy made no attempt to answer. The question was repeated in a sterner voice but still no answer. Then the minister shook his finger at the boy and asked in an even sterner voice, "Where is God?"

At that the boy ran from the room and into a closet and slammed the door. His older brother followed him in and asked what happened. The younger brother replied, "We're in trouble this time. God is missing, and they think we did it!"

While we know that God has never come up missing in the general sense, He has come up missing in some of our lives.

But if that is the case, it isn't because God doesn't want to be with us, but because we have chosen to walk away from Him.

Emmanuel, God with us, isn't a temporary reality – it is a permanent and consistent truth.

*As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." – 2 Corinthians 6:16b (NIV)*

While there are times in all of our lives when it might feel as if God has abandoned us, that is never the case. We must not allow our emotional state to determine what is truth and error. And the truth is, that no matter what you are dealing with right now, God will never leave you nor forsake you.

*"...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." – Matthew 28:20b*

Early this morning, as I was doing my devotions, I came across this story from Our Daily Bread. It touched my heart and I'd like to share it with you. It talks about God not forsaking us.

The story is narrated by Randy Kilgore who remembers the time he was in seminary. Let me read his words from Our Daily Bread:

"After my first semester in seminary, my family was given airline tickets to fly home for Christmas. The night before our flight, we realized we had less than \$20 for the trip. Parking, transportation, and other incidentals were certain to cost more than \$20. Heartsick, we resolved to pray about it. Though our children were small (6 and 2), we included them in the prayer time.

As we were praying, we heard footsteps in the hallway of the apartment building, and then "whisk"—the sound of an envelope sliding under the door. Inside the envelope was an anonymous gift of \$50.

The wonder reflected on our 6-year-old daughter's face matched the wonder in our own hearts. Here was a mighty God writing His name on a little girl's heart by hearing and answering our prayer in the same instant. And so we, like the psalmist David, could "talk of all His wondrous works!" (1 Chron. 16:9)."

Isn't that amazing? God hearing and responding to his children's prayer at the very moment of their need?

As Jesus came to this planet to meet our needs, He continues with us for time eternal – there will never be a time in your life, whether on this earth, or in the life to come, where Jesus will not be your ever-present companion.

“Emmanuel” meets our need to

#### **4. ...HAVE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

We have a need to know that there is more to life than what we are presently experiencing. We all want to improve our condition in life. And so, there's a desire in us to know what the future holds for us. All of us are concerned about our future, our children's future, our family's future, even with the future of this world. More often than not, that concern comes with a bit of fear or anxiety.

Because we cannot look ahead and know exactly what's going to happen. We can plan but our plans can go haywire because we don't control the future.

But God does. He has total control of the future. In fact, he knows what life has in store for you. One of the things he promises you is he will be with you every step of the way. Hebrews 13:5 *"God has said, 'Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.'"* None of us know what's going to happen in the next year. But regardless of what happens to you, you're not going to go through it alone. God says, "I'm with you, I'll always be with you, I have been with you, I'm going to keep on being with you! You'll never go through it alone." This is called God's faithfulness.

Because he is faithful, you can trust him to get you out of your confusing situation, if that is what you're going through right now. I remember the time I felt God was impressing on me to attend Bible school in preparation for ministry. I

wasn't sure whether that was really God. Maybe it was just a whim or an ambition. I was afraid that I would make a wrong decision. I didn't think I was cut out for it because I didn't think I was capable. But I went on anyway, got my pastor's recommendation, applied and enrolled for school. The school was located on 72<sup>nd</sup> St. in uptown New York, one of the busiest streets. As such, finding a spot to park was nothing short of a miracle.

So, one night I drove to the place to attend my first class. I had to drive instead of getting on the train because my fulltime job at the time was located in New Jersey and driving was the best way to come to the city. As I drove, I still felt ambivalent and wanted to just go home. Then, I arrived in New York and as I approached the street, of course, I saw cars lined up on both sides of the street and I thought I'd better go home. No way I could get a spot. Parking in a parking garage was out of the question because it will cost an arm and a leg. And I asked God, "Lord, did you really want me here?"

But, as I cruised down slowly down the road, looking for the address of building on my right side, I couldn't believe my eyes because when I found the address, right in front of the building was one empty spot that seemed to have been waiting for me. I thought I saw angels with drawn swords guarding the spot. Just kidding. Of course, I parked, attended class, and went home feeling good.

But that wasn't enough to convince me. I needed another touch from God. I'm the kind of guy who doesn't get convinced easily. But have you discovered that God is patient with us?

The following week, I still didn't know whether I would continue with the course. This time, the class was offered in Boston that weekend and with much hesitation I drove for four hours, all the while still questioning whether I was doing God's will. This time, I didn't need a parking lot miracle because the campus was located in a suburban area with a huge parking lot.

When the class started, I was nervous being in a class with new students, most from Boston, and that contributed to my uneasiness. I tried to listen intently but half of my mind was in New York. I wished I never came to this place and I kept wondering, “Lord, did you really call me?”

Just then, the professor quoted a verse from Matthew 4:19 which says, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

That verse struck me like it came from God directly to me. Then, I felt his peace and finally became convinced that he wanted me in ministry.

God never fails to guide us and direct us. Sometimes, it may seem he is not concerned about us, about our future. But he is. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:7, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*”

I’ve experienced it many times before. I’ve been confused many times before but he always comes through. Don’t ever doubt him. Just trust him. Wait on him.

But you know what, the best future he can ever give us is not in this world but in the world beyond. G. K. Chesterton declared, talking about Jesus coming to earth as a baby born in a manger, “God became homeless so that we could find a home.” And the home that God is giving us is in a place called “heaven.”

Jesus was once questioned by the religious leaders of His day and they demanded to know whether He was claiming to be the Messiah or not.

*Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say. And in the future you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven."* – Matthew 26:64 (NLT)

What was He saying? That as He has come, so shall He return. But when Jesus comes back, it will not be as a cuddly infant in a cradle. It will be as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, coming to judge those who refused His offer of companionship, and to take those who accepted Him to heaven.

There is a great day coming for those of us who are in a relationship with Christ – a day when we realize for the very first time the full splendor and wonder of God.

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people – Ephesians 1:18*

If you're a Christian, this is your greatest hope. All the world's splendor is nothing compared to the glory that you will see in heaven. This world is just a temporary stop. Everything here is temporary. That is why our eyes should focus on the mansion that Jesus has prepared for each of us in heaven, not on anything in this world that will only drag our spirits down, always.

A. W. Tozer said, "We must meet the uncertainties of this world with the certainty of the world to come."

And there in heaven, we will forever be with Jesus, our Emmanuel, "God with us". The world to come offers complete security in the presence of our Lord!

If you're not a Christian, Emmanuel has come to you on Christmas day. Will you, in turn, come to him and make him your Lord and Savior this Christmas?