



Free Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
in South Africa

## Sermon for Christmas Eve (Proper B) 2017

### *The Birth of Emmanuel!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish  
Shelly Beach

#### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 1, 18-25:

- <sup>ESV 18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
- <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
- <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
- <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
- <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).
- <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,
- <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

• ***Let us pray:*** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds so that we will realise and see, You are with us, as we hear Your Word. Amen.*

#### • **Dear Beloved of God!**

- As the Spirit of God hovered over the formless matter when Creation took place, so here is a new creative act of the Spirit when Jesus is born!
- And we see, how incomprehension, on the side of well-meaning humans, here revealed in the response of Joseph, tries to do the right thing. Joseph has no clue what's going on. Mary, his betrothed- we would say: formerly engaged to him- was found pregnant. To Joseph that could only mean, either he was the father or she had another man. Joseph was certain, he couldn't have been the father, because they hadn't become one flesh yet. So, he reasoned, Mary must have had an affair with another man. Therefore, Joseph wanted to terminate the betrothal, in secret, to save Mary's face in society.
- Joseph has Mary's well-being in mind. By the way, this is quite different from what

happened at the Fall, where Adam pointed to his wife as being the cause of his falling into sin.

• Nevertheless, Joseph was about to do the wrong thing, according to *God's* way. So, we get a glimpse of the very important notion, which will stretch right through the Gospel-writing, namely, for human beings to understand and know the ways of God, those ways *must be revealed* to them! Without revelation coming from God's side, we will be tumbling in the dark, well-meaning and all.

• Our own reason and strength cannot figure out the way in which God saves humankind from its sins. That is why we are so dependent on the Word of God. The Word of God gives certainty of what is going on. Anyone who refuses to use the Scriptures in this way, namely as revelation from God, will never understand what is going on in them, will never discover the golden thread going through them from beginning to end.

• On the other hand, trusting that it is truly God's Word, that it is a wonderful gift to us, opens up a new world, a world where God is present with Mary and Joseph and present tonight with us. I don't mean it mythologically or all- in- the- mind- kind- of- way, I mean it as reality.

• It was a miraculous birth, but that doesn't make it virtual reality. Mary was pregnant and this posed a real problem for Joseph. Nothing virtual or mythical for Joseph. You cannot easily hide pregnancy.

• And so for Joseph this whole birth starts quite awkward. But, before he could act out his plan of solving the problem in his own way, an angel of the Lord appeared to him at night. This happened numerous times to prophets in the OT times. God intervened for one reason only, to keep your and my salvation on track! God tells Joseph, that there is no need to fear to take Mary as his wife, because, neither he nor any other man is the father. The conception is created by the Holy Spirit.

• Mary will bear a son, and he, Joseph, should call his name "Jesus". And God gives the meaning of "Jesus": *"He will save His people from their sins"*. The name Jesus is His mission, here on earth, amongst fallen humankind. He came from the outside of this world to effectively deal with the darkness in us. Not only will Jesus forgive us our sins, that is remove the guilt of sin, but Jesus will also finally separate us completely from all evil and darkness.

• Saving includes full healing and restoration on the Last Day, of both of our bodies and souls, so that we will hear and do what God says!

- Like Joseph. He accepted the word from the angel of the Lord in his dream. He took Mary as wife, but did not become one flesh with her until, until the child was born and called His name Jesus!
- All of this fulfilled the old prophecy in Isaiah's time. God had commanded Ahas, king of Judah, to ask for a sign that would give him victory over his enemies. God wanted to give a gift to king Ahas. But king Ahas refused. God nevertheless gave the promise, namely: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel"*. Not long afterwards a child was born by the wife of Isaiah, but this child did not have that name and it was not conceived by a virgin. Rather, the child of Isaiah had a name that proclaimed the judgement over the house of Ahas, because he had rejected the help of God, and by doing so, he was messing with the mission of God, to save His people. He did not receive the gift God was giving him.
- This prophecy didn't stop there. It carried on and eventually latched onto the other important passage often read on Christmas Eve, namely Isaiah 9,6: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. God told Isaiah to not give up hope. Although Judah would fall under king Ahas, because he rejected the help of God, in the end the One called Immanuel will be born. He will not only be called Immanuel, but also Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- Who doesn't need a comforter, serious counselling- for us a child, God with us, is born! Who doesn't need the most powerful being in the universe on our side- a son is given, the government will be on His shoulder! Who doesn't need a Father who will never die- for you He is born. Who doesn't need a prince of heavenly peace- He was born, Immanuel.
- And what did He concretely come to do for us: He came to save us from our sins. This goes much deeper than we think. Sin destroys us. It might taste sweet for a while, but in the end it always enslaves us and kill us. It is sin that turns the beauty of life into ugly darkness. Not only are we affected by our own sinfulness, but also by the sins of others. Think about it for a moment, how we are entangled in a web of received sins against us and sins we have inflicted on others. We are hurt, they are hurt. Trust is broken on all sides. Nothing works as it should. Everyone takes as much as he or she can. If you neglect to check for one moment, you loose out immediately.
- No wonder our life is so hectic. Whoever tries to deal with all this stuff on his own, will

become empty, exhausted- burn out is imminent. We need serious counselling. Now, just like with any addicts, who have been enslaved by their addiction, there is this phase of denial. 'No. I don't need counselling'. Just like king Ahas, we also tend to think, let me sort out my own mess first. I can. I can handle it. Leave me alone!

• But, the truth is, we cannot live without Jesus! We cannot live without counselling, weekly counselling sessions with Immanuel. We need Mighty God on our side. We need the everlasting Father to be present with us, just like children need their fathers. Life is not all about doing, Life is not all about work. True life is not about survival of the fittest.

• True Life in the presence of the everlasting Father, in His living room, is about *being* sons of the Father. Life is above all a gift! There is time for rest, for beauty and music, for coming to know other beings, not the functions to be exploited of the beings. No. To come to know who they *are*. To *be* with them. To come to know who the everlasting Father is. To *be* with Him! And this is only possible by listening to the words coming from the hearts of those other people and especially Immanuel.

• This is how counselling happens, by having a good conversation with the counsellor. And our Counsellor is also the Prince of Peace. He brings the peace of God to us. He brings us together with God. He reverses the Fall. He is the place where God is present to be with us.

• To be able to be this for us, He had to be born, suffer, be crucified and had to die on our behalf. That is how sinful we are. That is how sick we are, that is how addicted we are, that is how enslaved we are with desiring the wrong things. But, Jesus fulfilled that prophecy! He rose from the dead victorious! He has the right name. He has done it for us. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

• Here we truly have the greatest gift ever given to us! Receive Him with joy. Embrace Him with your ears and hearts. Share Him with others with your mouth, praising God, for He is with us! That makes this night such a good night, such a holy night, such a beautiful night. The whole of nature celebrates this birth with us! Real substantial hope is given to us that the day of full restoration and peace for our souls and our bodies is dawning. That day is promised by Immanuel and therefore it is near. It is a matter of Grace with those still in denial. Therefore, we wait with patience and we share Jesus with urgency! Amen.

***The Lord Jesus Christ says: "Surely I am coming soon.'Amen. Come. Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you." Amen.***