

"GOD WITH US"

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14.

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Matthew 1:23.

Some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, God revealed to Isaiah the prophet His purpose concerning the nature and the mission of His Son Whom He was going to send into this world. Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's coming became the great and inspiring hope of the Israelites. Writing by divine inspiration, the prophet predicted the birth of the baby Jesus, God's Son, Who would be born of a virgin mother, live among men and die for their sins on a cross. He said that His name would be "Immanuel," which means "God With Us." The virgin birth of Jesus was prophetically stated and promised.

The Holy Spirit, Who inspired Isaiah to write, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," inspired Matthew to write, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Of all the names of Jesus, Immanuel is perhaps the one we use the least.

To the ancient Hebrew there was far more in a name than there is to us today. They did not give a name carelessly or thoughtlessly. It stood for the character and the purpose of a man. But this name was a divine gift. It was imposed upon the Child at His birth, and was intended to convey to men the meaning of His mission here upon earth -- "God with us."

What's in a name? Much in every way. The name of Herod stands for cruelty; the name of Alexander stands for conquest; the name of Demosthenes stands for eloquence; the name of Beethoven stands for music; the name of Milton stands for poetry; the name of Hitler stands for barbarity and bestiality; but the name of Jesus stands for Redeemer, Saviour, Deliverer, Comforter and Friend. Yes, there is much in a name!

Within the confines of the discussion of the virgin birth of Christ are two contending groups, namely, the enemies of God and the children of God. The enemies of God are trying to discredit the records. The children of God know the truth of this doctrine historically, but they have also experienced its blessedness, so nobody can shake their faith in this truth.

Jesus Christ was not born as other people. He was not the son of a human father. The Spirit of God Himself miraculously caused the conception of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. It is easy to understand why it was necessary for the Saviour to be born of a virgin, and that was because men are tainted with sin. All other children have been born with the cruse of sin upon them. If Jesus Christ were to be without the taint of sin, He needed to be conceived and to be born in a different manner from the usual course of mankind. Jesus was conceived and born of a virgin, and without a human father. The Scriptures specifically state that God was His Father. Not only did God say that He was the Father, but He neither

said nor intimated anything else. Joseph never claimed to be the father of Jesus Christ. The sinlessness of Christ and His vicarious death rest on the truth of the virgin birth of Christ.

Joseph was deeply concerned when he found that Mary, to whom he was engaged, would soon become a mother. Had she, whom he had loved and trusted, gone into sin, and was she about to become an unwed mother as the result of her sin? Must he renounce her, whom he loved so dearly, and have her stoned to death as an adulteress? While these thoughts troubled Joseph, he fell asleep, and the angel of God appeared to Him. Let us read the account of this incident as it is recorded in Matthew 1:18-25. Then Joseph, this just, righteous and wise man, rose and "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth a son; and he called his name Jesus." Nobody can find any evidence that is able to eclipse the affirmations of Isaiah, Matthew, Luke, Joseph, Mary, Gabriel and God concerning the virgin birth.

Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. The cradle and the babe, the wise men and the shepherds, the angels and the star, are not just fragments of a beautiful dream, but solid historical facts. Men have seen Christ face to face. They have listened to Him teaching, have watched Him working, have touched Him with their hands, have witnessed Him nailed to the cross on which He died and found the tomb in which He was buried empty after He had risen therefrom. His life story is a part of world history.

I can never forget how intense this sense of the reality of Jesus became as we traveled through Palestine a few years ago. How wonderful to stand on the very floor of the synagogue in Capernaum where His feet once rested! How moving to go down to the edge of the Sea of Galilee with the moon making a silver pathway over the waters and know that one dark night He walked on those self-same waters! Or imagine standing in that cave in Bethlehem which was once a stable and knowing that here He was born! Galilee and Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, they are real places, sacred today because Jesus lived and walked in them. This Christ, Who was born of the Virgin Mary, was real.

Christ was called Emmanuel, since His birth at Bethlehem signified that He was in fact "God with us" in our humanity. Although He was God, He voluntarily took upon Himself the likeness of human flesh. He was an answer to human need. And how great was that need! Any reader of human history knows that if ever a deliverer from human misery were needed, it was at that very time when Emmanuel came. The nations that had boasted of the culture of ancient civilization had become corrupt and were rotten from the top down. Man had reached the depths of depravity and helplessness, where it was obvious to all that he was incapable of entering into fellowship with a pure and holy God. So God took pity on man's inability and came and dwelt among men in the person of Christ. But what did He come here to do? Was Jesus born and did He grow up just to glorify childhood? Or, did He just come to show us how we ought to live? No, His purpose in coming was to die in order that men might be saved. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Emmanuel reveals God to us not only as the God of truth, but also as the God of grace. Christ's life was one of love and mercy. His love not only caused Him to give His life on Calvary for man's redemption, but it also caused Him to give His life in service to men while He was on His way to the cross. Everywhere He went He carried blessings. But the greatest manifestation of His love was seen when He willingly offered His life to meet the requirements of God's justice.

Emmanuel is the connecting link between God the perfect One and man the sinful one. He is the peacemaker between the Ruler and the rebel. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Man was utterly incapable of raising himself the smallest fraction of the distance from the depths of his sin to the exalted heights of heaven. In Christ God looked at us with human eyes, spoke to us with an earthly tongue and touched us with a brother's hand. When Christ was here among men, God was with us as never before nor since. He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Those who walked with Him and watched His life and understood Him and appreciated Him recognized the spirit, character and life of God Himself. In His mind were the thoughts, in His words the truth, in His deeds the principles, in His mission the purpose and in His death the love of God.

"God with us" in childhood is the first thought in Emmanuel. A child needs a sense of security, the feeling of being wanted and loved. Blessed is that child who has the consciousness of having a divine Friend who loves him, cares for him and is with him no matter what happens. God is with us in youth also. Youth is a time for decision. When the Lord through His church challenges a youth, he should reply: "Trusting in Christ my Saviour for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would have me do." The first miracle performed by Christ was on the occasion when He gave His blessing to the founding of a home at Cana in Galilee. God is with us in our business. The first five disciples whom He called were businessmen; four of them were fishermen, and the fifth a collector of revenue. When they yielded to the will of the Lord and followed Him they became men of far greater usefulness. Anyone acquainted with the whole broad field of achievement becomes aware of the fact that the majority of men whose work has influenced the world for good have found great strength in relating their lives to the Giver and Sustainer of life.

God is with us in our joys. He is always with us in our hours of happiness. God is with us in our hours of crisis. It is wonderful to know that there will never come to us a single experience, no matter how difficult or how sad, but that we can be sure that God is with us. He will be with us to the very end of the way. "God with us" is the hope of the sinner, the comfort of the sorrowful, the inspiration of the servant and the delight of the obedient. In Emmanuel we see the loving God, the redeeming God, the seeking God and the saving God. This faultless and loving Christ is the wonder of the world, the hope of the sinner and the glory of heaven. Since He is "God with us," we should trust Him, worship Him, love Him, follow Him and obey Him.

"Up Calvary's mountain, one dreadful morn,
Walked Christ my Saviour, weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the cross,
That He might save them from endless loss.

"Father, forgive them!" thus did He pray,
Even while His lifeblood flowed fast away;
Praying for sinners while in such woe --
No one but Jesus ever loved so.

"O how I love Him, Saviour and Friend,
How can my praises ever fine end!
Through years unnumbered on heaven's shore,
My tongue shall praise Him forevermore.

"Blessed Redeemer! precious Redeemer!
Seems now I see Him on Calvary's tree;
Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading --
Blind and unheeding -- dying for me!"