



Emmanuel

God With Us

Week 1

As we begin the Christian season called Advent, it is important to remember that this time in our Christian calendar is all about waiting. Advent comes from the Latin word that means “arrival”. It’s a time that we prepare and wait for the arrival of Jesus, or as he’s also referred to as, Emmanuel, which means God With Us.

Monday: Read Isaiah 7:13-17

Throughout the Old Testament there is an expectation that God’s anointed one, or the Messiah, would arrive one day to finally bridge the gap between God and humanity. Centuries before the birth of Jesus the prophet Isaiah wrote the verse you read today. Emmanuel means, God with us. There are prophecies about the Messiah coming from the family line of king David, about him being born in Bethlehem, prophecies about him having to flee to Egypt to escape being murdered. What does it mean to you when you hear the name, Emmanuel? What does its meaning of “God with us” mean to you?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. He was also a Jewish prophet. He spoke like a prophet and dressed like a prophet of old. John was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus’s ministry and his primary message is found in verse 2. Even before Jesus arrived on the scene, John was preparing people for his arrival. What jumps out at you from John’s warning to the people coming to be baptized? What image does he paint when he talks about who Jesus is? Does that image line up with your image of who Jesus is? In what ways is it the same? Different?

Wednesday: Read Matthew 24:36-44

One message of this season is repent and be ready for the return of Christ! One of the traditional readings for this the first Sunday in Advent is Matthew 24:36-44. It may seem strange to read about the future coming of Jesus as you prepare for the birth of Jesus. Why do you think this passage has been traditionally read during the beginning of advent? Does thinking about the end, change the way you see the present? How so? In what ways?

Thursday: Read John 3:16-17

Why do we give gifts at Christmas? We give gifts to remember the magi from the East who brought gifts to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And we give gifts to remind ourselves that we have received the greatest gift of all. That gift is seen in today's reading. What do these two verses say to you? Have you ever considered the actions of Jesus as a gift? What do you do when someone offer you a gift? What might you do differently this advent with the gift given through Jesus?

Friday: Read Colossians 3:1-11

In Paul's letter to the 1st century church, he describes ways to live as followers of Jesus. The first eleven verses mention prohibitions on our behaviors. Beginning in verse 12 he talks about additions to our behavior. Why might it be important to read this as you begin your advent journey? Re-read verse 11. Who is the good news of Jesus for in this world? Does this change your view on others who believe differently than you?

As you prepare for worship this coming Sunday say this prayer: *God, help me see you more clearly this week. Help me to see myself clearly this week. Change me. Guide me. Amen.*



Week 2

Monday: Isaiah 9:2-6

Verse six is a powerhouse in this section. In it, the prophet Isaiah is painting an image of who Jesus, Emmanuel, will be. What are some of the words he uses to describe the coming messiah? Do these words align with your view of Jesus? In what ways has your image of God changed over the years? Are you open to the idea that God may give you a new image this advent? Today, pray that God may give you a new vision if needed.

Tuesday: Read John 1:1-18

John's gospel is a mystical retelling of the life and acts of Jesus compared to the other three gospels. He begins with the origins of Jesus and says in verse 14, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. What does this mean? Do you really believe that Jesus, Emmanuel, God-With-Us dwells among us in the 21st century? Where have you seen this? If you haven't seen it, would you like to? Today pray that God helps you see his presence dwelling all around you.

Wednesday: Read John 6:35, 8:12, 10:14, 11:25

Remember, advent is about an arrival. It's about preparing to celebrate the arrival of Jesus. And it's about discovering who Jesus is. In these verses, Jesus tells us who he is. What does he claim in each one, and what does it mean to you? What might it mean to someone you love? Your church?

Thursday: Read John 6:35, 8:12, 10:14, 11:25 again

In Sunday's message, pastor Ben said that going back to the Old Testament, God was revealing his nature bit by bit to all of humanity through the people of Israel. This is going to be the Old Testament in less than one minute. This is the essence of God's revelation through the Old Testament.

- God is creator of the universe
- God is a relational God who works in and through history
- God wants his light to shine through the relationship he has with Israel to all people
- God desires to bring order to life through the law to help us live.
- God is faithful in all his promises, but gets disappointed by a faithless people, which lead to pictures of judgment and punishment.
- God redeems his people by forgiving the restoring them.
- God loves justice and mercy.
- And all along, God was planning an intervention with his faithless people.

How do yesterday's readings and images of God differ from the pattern we see in the Old Testament? Where are they the same? Do any of these images give you a reason to believe that 1st century Palestine was the ideal place for Jesus to arrive? If Jesus arrived in 21st century America, would this image look differently? How so?

Friday: Pause and Pray

Today is a day of reflection. What does a 1st century world have in common with the 21st century world you live in? What does Jesus in the 1st century have to do with you in the 21st century? To prepare for Sunday's message, begin to think about how God interrupted the world with the arrival of Jesus. And then think about how God might still be in the interruption business.



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Week 3

This week we will be reading Luke 1:26-38 each day and focusing on different parts of it along the way.

Monday: Read Luke 1:26-38

Reread verse 26-29. In verse 28 Mary is greeted by an angel and is called the “favored one”. What a great nick name. But in verse 29 Mary’s reaction to this greeting is confusion. In some versions of the Bible, it says Mary was troubled or greatly troubled. Why would this encounter with an angel leave Mary greatly troubled or confused? What do you imagine your reaction would be to any encounter with an angel?

Tuesday: Read Luke 1:28-30

What an interruption! At this point in Mary’s life, we imagine being pregnant is not on her list of priorities. This was not what she had planned at this moment. When have your plans and priorities changed because you sensed God telling you something? Have you ever felt like God was speaking to you? If not, do you want God to? Today is a good day to pause and simply pray, God, let me see you today.

Wednesday: Read Luke 1:30-33

Mary’s first reaction to the news of Jesus’s birth is confusion or fear. Which is why the angel said to her in verse 30, “Don’t be afraid. God is honoring you.” Think about that statement. God is honoring you! Have you ever thought that God was honoring you when you’ve stepped out in faith to do what you feel God is asking you to do? Or does it feel more like a burden? Which do you think Mary is feeling at this moment? How might your burdens be an honor from God?

Thursday: Read Luke 1:34

When you read it, it sounds like the angel is excited to tell Mary of God's plan. The angel reveals a miracle to Mary. But what does Mary say? Does she see a miracle at first? Or does she focus on the impossibility of it all? How many times do we focus on why things can't happen, and in so doing, miss a miracle? In what way might you be doing that right now?

Friday: Read Luke 1:35-38

This is ending of Mary's exchange with the angel Gabriel. It ends with Mary saying, *"I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said."* I am the Lord's servant. Say that out loud. I am the Lord's servant. As you go into the weekend let your prayer be, *God, give me the strength to be your servant. Show me who you are, who I am, and why it matters today.*

As you prepare for Sunday's message think about the concept of hope. Jesus is called the hope of the world. What does that mean to you? What might it mean to a broken world?



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Week 4

Monday: Read Matthew 12:17-21

God with us, means God is equipping us to be the hope of the world. Hope is one of the foundational principles of the Christian faith. It's one of the great gifts of Christmas that God wanted to communicate to the world. How have you seen this hope described in Matthew's gospel? When has someone embodied this hope to you? When have you embodied this hope to others? Today pray that God shows you this hope and uses you to show this hope to others.

Tuesday: Read Jeremiah 29:11

This is famous verse from the prophet Jeremiah. It's often shared on social media, on posters, and in motivational sayings by religious leaders. But what does it mean to you? Do you believe that God has a plan for you? For the church? For the world? Why or why not? If you do believe this verse, what do you think the plan looks like?

Wednesday: Read Matthew 11:28

In Sunday's message pastor Ben talked about the founder of the Salvation Army named William Booth. He said this: *Every Christmas there was a tradition in London that the churches would send representatives out into the streets to invite the poor to Christmas celebrations that each church would host. Huge crowds would gather waiting for an invitation. The Anglican representative would start by standing on a box and announcing, "All of you who are Anglicans, come with us." Then it was the Roman Catholics: "All who are Catholic, come with us." Then the Methodists, the Lutherans, and all the other denominations announced, "Whoever belongs to us, come with us." But after all the church representatives had made their invitations, there were always a lot of people still waiting around. At that point, William Booth would stand up on his box and shout, "All of you who belong to no one, come with me."* The reason God came to be Emmanuel, God With US, is to say those same words. *Come with me. Are you tired, burdened, heavy-laden, come with me.*

Today take a moment and pray. Begin with some silence, then take a deep breath and say, *Come with me. Come with me.* When you do, see if you notice them taking on life within your soul. See if they begin to sound like the words of God to your ears.

Thursday: Read Matthew 11:28 and 12:17-21 again.

If you choose to follow Jesus, and I hope that you do, he gives you the same responsibility as yesterday's reading. You are to go out into the darkness with the same intent, with the same invitation: *"All of you who belong to no one, come with me! Come with me. All who have not heard the gospel or have rejected it at some point in their lives, come with us. All who are weary and heavy laden, come with us, and God will give you rest. All who are in any kind of need, who are without hope, come with us. All who wish to be a part of a community where Christ is Lord and everybody is somebody, come with us."*

When's the last time you said something like this to anyone? When have you said something like this to yourself? Today, pray for the courage and creativity to be able to say such a thing.

Friday: Pray and Invite

Today is a day to pray. As you prepare for Christmas Eve and the birth of Jesus, pray that you might indeed see Emmanuel, God With Us. God with you! And pray that God may give you the courage to invite someone to join you in your worship. *'All who wish to be a part of a community that loves God and loves people, come with me.'*