



This week we have a special treat. We are in the middle of our worship series, Incarnation, based on the book by Adam Hamilton senior pastor of Church of the Resurrection in Kanas City. This week we have Adam Hamilton as our guest preacher with his message “Emmanuel in the Midst of Pandemic.”

**Sermon**      *Incarnation: Emmanuel in the Midst of Pandemic* -Adam Hamilton  
(From Chapter 3 of Adam Hamilton’s book, *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas*)

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:20b-23)*

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:1-3)*

For several weeks, people in the US had been hearing about a new, highly contagious virus and the respiratory illness it produced in those who contracted it. First reported in Wuhan, China, around Christmastime in 2019, the virus killed thousands there and the Chinese government took radical steps to keep it from spreading. Yet, Wuhan seemed far away from everyday life in America.

But during the second week of March 2020, everything changed in America. That week all but one state in the union confirmed cases of the coronavirus. The outbreak was still relatively small— about three thousand confirmed cases with sixty deaths. But the virus was spreading exponentially. The death rate of one to two percent of those who fell ill from the virus was considerably higher than the mortality rate from a typical flu.

That week, the nation took unprecedented steps to address the invisible threat. The NBA suspended its season. The NCAA canceled March Madness. In New York, Broadway theatres went silent. The nation’s art galleries closed. Disney’s theme parks shut down. Universities across the country suspended classes, then local school districts everywhere announced students would not be coming back to their classrooms until the fall. Mayors, then governors, then the President of the United States declared a state of emergency. Churches closed their doors and those who could opted to broadcast worship via the internet. Senior living centers and nursing homes were placed on lockdown, not allowing visitors in to see residents. Essential functions and services were maintained, but most everything else shut down. America had closed.

All of this uncertainty, fear, and concern over the impact to the economy spread to the markets. The stock market began seeing huge gyrations, losing 35 percent of its value before starting to recover. Within weeks, twenty-six million people were out of work.

Some spoke of the concern and mass closings as hype and hysteria, an overreaction to a “flu bug.” Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at a worst-case scenario in which 1.7 million Americans, mostly over sixty, might die as a result of COVID-19, the name of the disease caused by the new coronavirus. No one anticipated this would be the case, but there was grave concern that hospitals might overflow with patients, resulting in a lack of ventilators to help those with severe cases of the disease to survive.

Fear and panic are in the air as I write these words. Our pastors and staff have been working each day to be a calming presence, to engage our church members in serving others, and to help them know that God is with us in the midst of this battle. As of this day, 140,000 people have died of COVID-19, including eight of my parishioners or their family members. By the time you read this, many more people will have died from the disease.

In biblical times, there were pandemics—the Bible calls them “pestilence” or “plagues.” Pestilence is mentioned more than fifty times in the Bible. The biblical writers and their contemporaries did not know about germs that cause diseases. They could not see the microscopic genetic machines we call viruses that hijack healthy cells and use them to replicate their unhealthy genetic codes. When faced with an outbreak of disease, their only conclusion was that the rapid spread of illness which killed thousands of people must have been the work of God.

Understandably, some are saying similar things today—that the pandemic must be the will of God. Some believe God sent the coronavirus pandemic to punish us, to teach us, or to bring good out of us. I don’t believe that.

Today, we have a basic understanding of viruses: what they are, how they mutate and spread, and how they attack our bodies. We devote resources to develop anti-viral treatments and vaccines. If we believed these viruses were sent by God, then aren’t researchers and doctors who strive to prevent and combat them fighting against God? But that’s not what we believe. Instead, we fight against these viruses because we believe that the indiscriminate deaths of grandparents, parents, and even children is not God’s will. I do not believe that God sent the coronavirus, but I do believe he is with us in the midst of this pandemic, doing what God always does—comforting, leading, consoling, and wringing good from the adversity and pain. There will be plenty of silver linings from this frightening turn of events. Even now, in the midst of the pandemic, the world has changed in so many ways for the better. There is tragedy and death, but there is life, hope, goodness, and love.

Books are written and submitted for publication months before they go to press. You hold this book in your hand knowing how the battle against the coronavirus played out. You know if the school and business closures and quarantines helped to “flatten the curve” and slow the spread of the virus, thus saving lives. I’m writing in the midst of the storm, knowing things may get worse before they get better. I sit here bracing for what lies ahead, but I do so with hope—a hope that is rooted in Advent and Christmas.

What does the pandemic have to do with Advent and Christmas? Everything, I think. Fear is in the air today, as it was again and again in the lives of God’s people in the Bible. Over one hundred times in scripture, God, an angel, a prophet, the psalmist, or Jesus himself said to someone, “Don’t be afraid.” Why not fear? Consistently the answer was because “God is with us.” This response is at the heart of the Christmas story; it is the essence of the Incarnation. The God who has always been with his people came to us, in the flesh, in Jesus.

As Matthew wrote the opening to his Gospel, retelling the Christmas story and reflecting on the significance of the birth of Jesus, he offered these words: “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us’” (Matthew 1:22-23).

This was a remarkable connection Matthew made with the words of Isaiah, and an essential insight about the meaning of Christmas and the significance of Jesus. No other New Testament author cited these words of Isaiah. In this chapter, we’ll explore Isaiah’s words concerning this name, Emmanuel, why Matthew used it to refer to Jesus, and what it means for us to call Jesus Emmanuel today.

## Isaiah's Prophecy

Let's begin by turning the clock back approximately 735 years before the birth of Jesus. At this time in Israel's history, the kingdom that David and his son Solomon had ruled two centuries earlier had split into two kingdoms. If you think of the American Civil War between the North and the South, that's a little like what happened to the kingdom of Israel after the death of Solomon. Nine of the original twelve tribes of Israel broke away and formed what became known as the Northern Kingdom.\* These nine tribes retained the name Israel for their kingdom, but they rejected Solomon's son, Rehoboam, as their king. To make matters a bit more confusing, the prophets sometimes referred to the Northern Kingdom as Ephraim after the tribe whose land included the capital of the north, Samaria. And even more confusing, at times they referred to the Northern Kingdom simply as Samaria, after its capital city.

To the south, the Southern Kingdom came to be known as Judah after the largest and most dominant tribe in this region. This kingdom was made up of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon. Its capital was Jerusalem and its people remained loyal to Solomon's son, David's grandson, Rehoboam, after the northern tribes broke away. Levites served the religious needs of the community in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

By Isaiah's time, the two kingdoms had been divided for almost two hundred years. Despite their differences, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms still shared history, language, religion, and culture. Sometimes, they were military allies who joined against a common enemy. At other times, they fought each other.

That takes us to the context of the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah. Around 735 BC, the Northern Kingdom of Israel formed an alliance with the kingdom of Aram—located in what is today western Syria. Israel and Aram hoped to rebel against the dominant superpower of the day, the Assyrian Empire, freeing themselves from Assyrian control and the payment of heavy taxes to the Assyrians. To do this, they needed Judah's help and support. But King Ahaz of Jerusalem refused to join their coalition.

As a result, the kings of Aram and Israel prepared to attack Judah, planning to kill Ahaz and to install a king favorable to their plans, one who would lead Judah's armies into battle with them against the Assyrians. This was terrifying to Ahaz and to the people of Judah. Isaiah 7:2b notes, “. . . the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.” It was then that God told Isaiah the prophet to find King Ahaz and to say, “Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands” (Isaiah 7:4). The two smoldering stumps referred to the kings of Israel and Aram. Then God promised that the harm the two kings sought to do to Ahaz would not happen, provided Ahaz would stand firm in his faith.

That takes us to the sign of Immanuel. God essentially said to Ahaz, “Ask me for a sign that what I've promised will happen, that these two kings will be no threat to you.” But Ahaz refused to ask for a sign. In response Isaiah tells Ahaz:

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.” (Isaiah 7:14-16, emphasis added)*

The events that led to this word from Isaiah occurred around 735 or 734 BC. Isaiah's prophecy unfolded just as he foretold. A young woman—the Hebrew word for young woman, *almah*, can mean a young woman, an unmarried young woman, a virgin—“is pregnant” (*harah* in Hebrew, which usually signifies one is already pregnant) and will give birth to a son. In its original context, this is referring to a young woman of Ahaz's time, perhaps a young woman the king has married or a new wife of Isaiah. This young woman has become pregnant, will give birth, and she will name her son Immanuel. This child will be a visible sign of God's promise to put an end to the threat of these two kings Ahaz fears. God tells Ahaz, before the boy is old enough to know right from

wrong—perhaps pointing to the child at age three or four, or maybe when he becomes a man at twelve or thirteen—the two kings and their kingdoms will be abandoned.

In 732 BC, when the child was two or three, the Assyrians attacked both Aram and Israel, and forcibly relocated some of their people to Assyria. This may have been the fulfillment of the prophecy. But it seems more likely the prophecy refers to Immanuel at age twelve or thirteen. In the year 722 BC, the Assyrian army marched on the Northern Kingdom of Israel and destroyed it, taking the rest of her people into exile. And in 720 BC, Aram was destroyed as well, precisely as God had foretold through the prophet.

The child, Immanuel, whose name meant, “God is with us,” was a living sign of God’s promise to Ahaz both that God was with him, and that God would protect Ahaz and the people of Judah.

Isaiah was one of the most important books of the Hebrew Bible for Jesus, as it was for the early church. The New Testament contains more than sixty allusions or direct quotations from Isaiah. Many of them point to a particular way of reading the book. Much of what Isaiah prophesied was, as we’ve seen above, addressing the specific circumstances of the prophet’s day or the near future. It foretold how God was about to work at that time the book was written. But every generation of Jews that followed Isaiah’s time looked at his words in light of their own time, and heard in them a picture of how God might work in their time as well. Early Christians also read Isaiah this way, typologically, seeing in Isaiah’s words a type or pattern that was being repeated in their own time or, for Christians, how God had worked in and through the life of Jesus.

That is how Matthew read Isaiah 7:14 and the promise of a child whose name would be called Immanuel. Let’s turn now to Matthew’s Gospel.

## **The Incarnation**

This is how Matthew tells the Christmas story:

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)*

Notice the birth is just five words: she had borne a son. The rest of the story is largely about the Annunciation to Joseph as he slept, making it clear that the child Mary was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matthew emphasizes this twice in these verses. And then, to address the implications of this unique conception, Matthew draws upon Isaiah 7:14: “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’”

As we’ve seen, the child whose birth Isaiah had foretold with these words was an ordinary child who lived in the eighth century before Christ, to serve as a sign of God’s presence with King Ahaz. But for Matthew, that first Immanuel was a foreshadowing of Jesus. There is no evidence that Mary ever called Jesus Emmanuel. The name is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. Matthew alone found in this somewhat obscure verse a powerful picture of who Jesus is and why he came.

The emphasis on Jesus’s conception by the Holy Spirit seems to be Matthew’s way of pointing to his unique identity. By virtue of this unique conception, this child to be born would somehow be both Son of Man and Son of God. The idea that Jesus was the Son of God is a major theme in Matthew. Seventeen times in Matthew, Jesus is identified as the “Son of God” or “God’s Son.” Twice in the Gospel, God speaks from heaven (at Jesus’s baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration) saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am

well pleased.” In the temptations in the wilderness, the devil tempts Jesus to question his identity as the Son of God, or to prove it. When Jesus encounters the demons, they can’t help but acknowledge that he is God’s Son. Jesus regularly refers to God as his Father and doesn’t deny any claims when others call him the Son of God.

Matthew does not offer us a fully developed Trinitarian theology of how God is at once Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He offers us no clear explanation for how Jesus could be fully God and fully human, as the Council at Nicaea would attempt to do three hundred years after Jesus’s birth. But throughout the Gospel, Jesus is shown to do the things we would expect God to do. He heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind, forgives sinners, miraculously feeds the multitudes, and even raises the dead. He controls nature, walks on water, casts out demons, and conquers death. In a way that was never true for Isaiah’s Immanuel, God was with us in this Emmanuel, Jesus.

### **Incarnation: God Experiences Humanity**

This is what we mean when we speak of the Incarnation: God took on flesh and entered our world as a human being. It is clear in scripture that Jesus is not merely God wrapped in human flesh—God in a body. He became human in Jesus. He experienced what we experience as humans. In Jesus, God experienced temptation, love, hunger, joy, fear, friendship, grief, doubt, rejection, a sense of abandonment by God, and death. He wept, he bled, he suffered, he died. There is something profoundly moving about God actually knowing what we are experiencing as humans.

We have a team of amazing unpaid staff members at Church of the Resurrection called Congregational Care Ministers (CCM). They are gifted, called, and trained to care for our members as they walk through adversity. Most have experienced some pain themselves. Some have lost children; some lost family members to suicide. Some have been through divorce, job loss, or cancer. When a member of Resurrection loses a child, they are grateful that I, or one of our other pastors, stopped by to care for them. But there is a qualitative difference in care when a CCM who has lost a child themselves comes to care for these grieving parents. It makes a difference when their caregiver has actually walked in their shoes, knows their pain, and has survived the darkness they are walking through. This makes all the difference.

This is in part what is so powerful about the idea of the Incarnation. God doesn’t just imagine what it’s like to be human—how could an all-powerful God really know what it is like to be weak, scared, tempted, or hurt—in Jesus, he became flesh. The apostle Paul quotes what was likely an early hymn of the church in Philippians 2, using the word *ekenosen* (“emptied”) to describe the Incarnation. In Jesus, God “emptied himself” of his divine power to experience life as one of us.

God knows the smell of rain on a summer day. He’s tasted a meal of warm bread and smoked fish with a glass of wine. He knows the joy of sharing it with good friends. He’s seen, with the same eyes we see with, the beauty of a sunset. He’s known how the human heart feels when it loves deeply and the intensity of grief when a good friend dies. He knows what it feels to laugh and cry, to be angry and afraid—not as the omniscient, all-powerful, omnipresent God—but as we experience these things: in the flesh.

He also experienced the same frailties, frustrations, temptations, and desires of the flesh we experience. As a boy, he chafed under his parents’ authority just as many of us did (see Luke 2:41-52). As a teen, he knew raging hormones. As a young man, he surely felt the burning desire of lust. He knew anger, impatience, pride, and the ease with which we can say and do things that hurt others. He knew the temptation to drink too much. He knew the lure of wealth and power. Hebrews 4:15 notes that Jesus was “tested as we are, yet without sin.”

When you come to God, pouring out your heart, asking for his help, or praying for his forgiveness, you pray to one who knows—who understands what it is to be fallible, frail, and fearful. This is the power of the Incarnation.

From the moment it was released in 1995, I loved Joan Osborne’s hit, “One of Us.” The song repeatedly asks listeners, “What if God was one of us?” Osborne then asks what we might think if God came walking on this planet, “just a slob like one of us.” To me it’s a Christmas carol, capturing the essence of the Christian gospel.

The notion that God might show up looking human is not so hard to believe. Plenty of Hollywood films have done a great job developing this idea. I think of *Evan Almighty* and *Bruce Almighty*. Perhaps my favorite

movie in this vein was *Oh God!*, which was released in 1977. In that movie, the recording artist John Denver played an assistant manager in a grocery store who considered himself an atheist. God is played by George Burns, a short, elderly man who wore thick glasses and a ball cap. In the film, God revealed himself to a skeptical John Denver, began to prove to him that he really was God, and called him to become an apostle.

In the movie, God appears in human form. God could have chosen to be a man or woman of any color or shape. The Creator who spoke the world into being certainly would have the power to do that. But that is not what Christianity professes to have happened. It teaches that God in Jesus did not simply assume human appearance but, in some mysterious way, actually was born and lived as a human being.

### **Incarnation: God Reveals Himself to Humanity**

I recently had a conversation with a young man in my congregation who was struggling with his faith. I had baptized him as an infant and been his pastor his entire life. He was at college and a friend of his, an atheist, was raising good questions that he'd struggled to answer. Among these was, "If there really is a God, why doesn't he just show himself to us?" He asked me, "Pastor Adam, have you ever seen God?"

I began by reminding him that the universe is, by some calculations, about ninety-three billion light-years across (a light-year is how far light travels in a year at approximately 186,000 miles per second). Some suggest the universe is far larger still. God created all of it, stands outside and beyond it, while at the same time God's presence permeates it all. God animates the cosmos, sustains it, and holds it together.

Moses once said to God, "Show me your glory." God replied, in essence, "You could not survive the experience." A couple of years ago, we had a terrific solar eclipse in Kansas City. Everyone was gearing up to see it. But do you remember the warnings given at a solar eclipse? Again and again we were told, "Don't look directly at the sun during the eclipse. You could seriously damage your eyes." We bought special glasses to be able to see. This concern for our eyesight was over looking at our relatively modest star, the sun, even as it was being obscured by the moon. The universe is thought to contain between two hundred billion and two trillion galaxies, each containing billions of stars like our sun. They reflect God's glory, which is greater than the total of these combined! Like Moses we say, "Show us your glory." And God says, "Really?"

The psalmist recognized this: "The heavens are telling the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). Yes, I have seen God, or at least a reflection of him, in the world around us. The sun, moon, and stars, the beauty of the earth from the highest mountains to the marvel of human DNA—it all reveals God.

But I told this young man, the God whose glory fills the cosmos actually did what you asked, and what Moses asked, and what every thoughtful human being has asked—he did come to show himself to us in a way we could see. He came to us in Jesus. He is, the scripture says, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). The author of Hebrews writes, "He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:3a). Jesus said to his disciples, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30), and "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

So, yes, I see God through the world that God has made, I told this young man, but I see God most clearly when I look at Jesus.

When I picture what God is like—God's character, love, mercy, and grace—I see Jesus. I see him loving broken people, eating with sinners and tax collectors. I see him healing the sick and restoring vision to those who were blind. I see him touching the lepers who were treated as untouchables and restoring them to the community by healing their affliction. I see him coming upon a funeral procession and sharing the grief of a mother who had lost her son, and then raising the young man back to life. I think about the Jesus who cast out demons from those who were mentally ill or plagued by forces greater than themselves. I think of the compassion he showed to the prostitute who wept at his feet. I think about the Jesus who said, "the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). When I pray, I pray to the God who showed me what God is like, thanks to all the ways that Jesus revealed God's heart. This is what Emmanuel means to me.

### **Incarnation: God Is with Us**

Matthew begins his Gospel telling us that Jesus is "God with us"—Emmanuel. At the end of his Gospel, he recounts Jesus's final words to his disciples, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). It

is not just that God was with us in Jesus, but that Jesus continues to be with us. He is still Emmanuel. And because I believe he is with me, I live differently; I have peace, I find strength, I live seeking to walk with him.

When I visit someone in the hospital, I take the person's hand and sometime before I leave I say, "I came here to be a physical reminder that Jesus is with you. Feel my hand. I came to remind you that Jesus is with you here in this room, all the time."

Because God is with us, we need not fear. Throughout the Bible, the Israelites would become afraid, as King Ahaz was in Isaiah's day. God's response was always the same. It is captured in Deuteronomy 31:6: "Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you." The Incarnation was God's way of putting flesh on this promise; God is with us.

For many years, our family dog was a beagle named Maggie. Maggie was a surprise Christmas gift to my wife and children when the girls were ten and thirteen. I loved this little dog. She grew up with my daughters; even after they became adults and left home, she was still there to greet me at the door when I'd get home every day, tail wagging and eager for my companionship. As she grew older and her vision faded and she couldn't hear, she'd always be at my feet. I think she felt safe when I was around.

On a summer day in 2014, Maggie and I were home alone as I worked on my sermon for the weekend. I noticed that she was acting strangely. Thinking she needed to go outside, I took her out into the yard. She stumbled and fell down, and then lay in the grass. She appeared to be having a stroke. She was panting and appeared frightened. I was certain she was about to die. I lay down next to her in the grass, stroked her head with one hand, and wrapped my other arm around her as I repeated to her over and over, "Maggie, it's okay, it's okay. I'm right here."

Maggie survived that brush with death and lived for another couple of years before finally succumbing to death at the age of sixteen. When she died, my wife LaVon and I were both with her, holding her and telling her once more, "Don't be afraid, Maggie; we're here with you." I've been with a lot of people who died, including grandparents I truly loved, but I've never cried as hard as I did that day when Maggie died. She'd been my daily companion for sixteen years. When I think of the Incarnation, I think of these two experiences with Maggie. In Jesus, God came to us to be with us in our fear, our struggles, and our pain. Matthew was right to call him, Emmanuel, "God with us."

### **Our Mission—to Incarnate the Love of God**

That leads me to one concluding thought. Jesus came to incarnate God's presence and love to humanity. But before he left this earth, he called us to do the same in his name. Jesus's followers are intended to put flesh on the invisible God, to incarnate God for the world. We know what this looks like because we see incarnation in Jesus as we read the Gospels. Paul notes that the church is "the body of Christ." We are the ongoing incarnation.

Dr. Philip Ireland was an emergency medicine physician in Liberia during the terrible Ebola outbreak a few years ago. When the epidemic started, some Western doctors fled the country. But Dr. Ireland wasn't leaving, these were his people. Then he came down with the deadly virus. During the night he thought might be his last, he was in a hospital ward, lying on a plastic sheet. He vomited and had diarrhea so many times, he finally passed out. The next morning, he awoke, as he recounts, "barely alive, in a sea of mess."

That is when a physician's assistant named Patrick came to him, cleaned him from head to toe, dressed him in clean clothes, placed him in a bed, prayed for him, and encouraged him. Dr. Ireland wrote, after he recovered, "His act of love towards me, to wash me, was so much so that I will never forget it in my entire life." This physician's assistant was Emmanuel for Dr. Ireland. He incarnated—he put flesh on—the presence, love, and mercy of God.

Most of us will never be called upon to care for Ebola patients, though by the time you are reading this, there will be many stories of those who cared for persons with COVID-19. But all of us are called to follow Emmanuel, and in turn, to incarnate his presence and love to others.

Jesus is God with us. Because he is Emmanuel, Jesus knows and understands you, including your temptations, struggles, pain, and afflictions. Because he's Emmanuel, he is able to show you who God is and

what God is like. As Emmanuel, he seeks to remind you that he is always with you and you don't need to be afraid. He calls you to go in his name to incarnate God's love to others.

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

Will you pray: *Oh God, how grateful we are that you came to us in Jesus Christ, our Emmanuel. You understand our humanity, our fears, our weaknesses, our succumbing to sin, those moments when we are less than what you wish us to be. You understand our love, our hurts, and our pain. You understand our struggle with grief and death. Thank you for revealing yourself to us in Jesus, that we might know who you are and that we might walk with you and love you all of our days. Lord, use me to be Emmanuel for those who don't know you. Help me to incarnate your love and grace to all that I meet. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

(From Chapter 3 of Adam Hamilton's book, *Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas*)