

## **EMMANUEL MEANS GOD WITH US—BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?**

It's the season once again to celebrate the birth of Christ the King. To countless others, it's an opportunity to give and receive gifts. For still others, this season is cause for depression—a holiday reminding them of broken families and shattered dreams. Again, to others the meaning of Christmas is not important, what's vital is getting together with friends and loved ones, to enjoy a warm meal, pound down a few cold ones, and take the inebriation experience to the next level.

Last Thursday night I went to see my nephew Kai, perform before a live audience of proud parents, relatives, and friends. The spectacle was celebrating the birth of Jesus with children's voices filling the auditorium. Through song and "sermonette", emphasis was given to the name "Emmanuel" which translated means "God with us". The way it was emphasized perhaps missed the gravity of the reality. Here's what I mean.

When the emphasis is made that God is with "us", with "me", in "my heart", through Jesus, while true, it can often miss the deeper, more basic reality of what it means for "Emmanuel" to be with us.

For God to be with us, implies that He is present, He is there; He is here. It's one of God's attributes that no other creature can share. Unlike His holiness which he promises to share with His people, God's omnipresence is peculiar only to Him. It means that God is everywhere, at all times, in all places, and simultaneously being non-spatially extended, incapable of being circumscribed because He is not physical, but immaterial. God is spirit.

For God to be with us, also implies that He is present to lavish divine kindness toward His creatures. This He does in many ways ultimately by rescuing God haters and transforming them into lovers of the Creator.

For God to be with us also means that he is present to punish the wicked. Unwittingly, many think that Hell (i.e., the punishment awaiting the unrighteous who reject Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah and only Savior of humanity from sins and death's grip) is the absence of God's presence, but that's impossible in light of God's omnipresence. My understanding is that what makes Hell, Hell, is God's wrathful presence equitably distributed to each individual.

Theologically, this term is pregnant with meaning. It speaks of the incarnation (i.e., the orthodox doctrine that Jesus is Fully God and Fully Man) which is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews, but to the called, Christ Jesus is both the wisdom of God and the power of God. What

makes Jesus different from all other figures of history (philosophers, educators, statesmen, “religious” figures, builders, etc.) is that he claimed to be the self-existent, uncreated Creator who upholds all of creation by the word of his power. That’s who Emmanuel is.

The mystery of the babe in the manger who became a real human being without relinquishing his divine nature is the mystery being proclaimed through Christmas Carols, Children’s Choirs and this Holiday season. Does Emmanuel mean that Jesus is in my heart? Yes, but in this shallow theological era which we are presently experiencing in the history of the church, opportunities come once a year where the wonder of Emmanuel can be explained in a way that brings out the nuances explained above.

Why “go so deep” one may opine. Keep it simple stupid. I think there’s a place for that, but when we keep it *so simple that we help people remain stupid* about our amazing Savior, I don’t see Jesus honored, but belittled. May Emmanuel, God with us, never become dull, but may the wonder of the Incarnation (Jesus Fully God/Man) ever be the hope of the church, and the rescue for clueless rebels who are a vapor away from eternity.