

Intro: Stefan Duerksen Lead Pastor

Celebrations: MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

I want to tell you a secret!

- **Do you want to know what's BETTER than spending 20\$ on yourself? SPEND 20\$ on someone else!** Unexpected!
- **Acts 20:35** In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
- **I really want to encourage our young people! and the rest of us! test the Lord! See if it is true, "It is more blessed to GIVE than RECEIVE."**
- **Christmas Offering – ask Jesus how you can partner – Every dollar counts – watch Jesus multiple in Kingdom fruit what we offer back to Him!**
 - **The missions– Camp** – you saw the video – Our staff have said 1 week of camp can be the equivalent of over half a year of normal ministry! We need this for the days we are in!
- **Tupendane** – your generosity is literally changing lives! In thousands of kids in the orphanage, growing crops, training, tractors, farm!
- **Church Renewal** – we continue to see testimonies pouring in – as they equip the church and believers to fulfill the great commission and great command!

GIVING CHALLENGE: Blessed to be a blessing → Look for someone to bless and be a blessing to them! Use your gifts, talents, resources, etc. to bless them. (Phil 2:1-8)

- Give a Bible – share a verse - Shovel a driveway – make a meal – help someone – be a shoulder to cry on

Celebrations & Church-Wide Prayer: Christmas offering - Peace and Salvation for all of Israel!

- PRAISE God for what He has done through Camp!
- PRAISE God for what He has done through Tupendane!
- PRAISE God for what He has done through Church Renewal!
- PRAISE God for coming down to our level – born a baby- shared our weakness – paid our debt for sin – gave us the Holy Spirit – and is coming back a 2nd to be with us!
- Pray for Christmas Offering – that God would provide & multiply what is provided into even MORE Kingdom fruit! That “dead people – would come to life!” from each \$\$ given
- Pray for the Generosity Challenges – “no one stands alone” “each one, reach one” to take root in our church – that we would model extravagant love to those around us!
- Pray for Jesus to reveal himself to Israelis & Palestinians. Pray for their salvation!
- Pray for peace in Jerusalem – Peace in Israel

Today... This is the season we celebrate the birth of our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ.

I recognize for many, even those in our church family... this is a difficult time of year. From grief, to loneliness, to increased mental health struggles... with it being cold outside, less sunlight, being busy, gatherings, buying gifts – exchanging gifts – it’s easy to lose sight of WHY Christmas is worth celebrating!

Last week P. Ray pointed out to us that God doesn’t just want to VISIT. He doesn’t want a VISITATION. He wants a HABITATION! Look at Eden! He WALKED with Adam & Eve!

One of my Favorite TRUTHS is EMMANUEL – God with us! This is one of the biggest things we are celebrating at Christmas – and there is tension even with this – NOW – NOT YET. He came, he is with us in Spirit, but he is coming back again and we will be together forevermore!

Christmas is the celebration of GOD taking on flesh and being born as a human – a God Man – the Incarnation!

Matthew 1:18-23 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... 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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Matthew is very careful to include the prophecy in Isaiah and states Jesus is the fulfillment!

A. Immanuel in Isaiah

FIRST: Immanuel vs Emmanuel – BOTH are correct. One is Hebrew, one is Greek. Don’t be thrown off and think you are spelling it wrong.

Historical context: The Prophet Isaiah lived in the land of Judah 700 years before Jesus was born

- Isaiahs prophesied about Jesus! Birth, death, plan of redemption and restoration – in DETAIL
 - Skeptics have claimed forgery! Saying it was written AFTER Jesus, not BEFORE.
 - DEAD SEA SCROLLS in 1947 –copies of the entire OT, minus Esther, were found and date will into the BC or before Christ era!
- Israel had split into two nations after Rehoboam. 10 tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel and 2 tribes formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- **Assyria was a growing threat** to both Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Alliance is made between Israel & Syria – who try to include Judah
- When King Ahaz refused, Rezin and Pekah planned to retaliate by overthrowing Judah and then replacing Ahaz with another king who would support the alliance.

Isaiah 7:2-9 Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of

Remaliah. Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."

- **Just imagine yourself in Ahaz's place! What are you facing today?** a health crisis, loss of job, the culture is changing, you are feeling pressed on every side – and you go the Lord and his instruction, "FEAR NOT. KEEP CALM. DON'T BE AFRIAD.
- **My Example: Years ago when I lost my job... tell the story of Pioneer Grain to Steinbach Dodge**
- **Only God can look at the worst situations in our lives and say, FEAR NOT – STAND FIRM IN FAITH.**

Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "It will not take place, it will not happen,... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

- What a powerful challenge to the King! And to us! If we are not firm in FAITH – we will not be FIRM at all.

Isaiah 7:10-17 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

will we be like Ahaz? Or, will we give an unwavering YES to God and stand firm?

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

- **FIRST:** the truth to carry them through hardship? EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US! If God is for us, who can be against us! The TRUTH of EMMANUEL GIVES US HOPE & STRENGTH TO ENDURE!
- **SECOND:** Isn't this a prophecy about Jesus? Isaiah seems to be talking about different events?
- **Isaiah is speaking of 2 signs, 2 events, 2 sons:**
 - V. 16 – is a sign that would have been relevant to King Ahaz's immediate problem, two kings would be destroyed.
 - V. 14 –referred to a son that would be born of a virgin. Yet Ahaz and Isaiah already had wives who weren't virgins; and the son is named Immanuel – God with us.
 - **And this takes us to Isaiah 8 & 9**

First: the son of Isaiah 8

Isaiah 8:3-4 (ESV) And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz" for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

- This matches exactly what Isaiah said in chapter 7:16. I should add – Judah also suffered and you read of that in the rest of ch 8. LOTS THERE – BUT FOR ANOTHER TIME.

Second: the son of Isaiah 9

- **FIRST:** 9:1-3 Isaiah addresses an enlarged Kingdom – United: Judah, Galilee & NT Israel
- **SECOND:** Ch 9's son will give them VICTORY – PEACE – and he is MIGHTY GOD
- **THIRD:** Ch 9 son is DIVINE vs Ch 8 son is HUMAN

Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV) 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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** Of the **increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,** on the **throne of David and over his kingdom,** to establish it and to uphold it with **justice** and with **righteousness** from this time forth and **forevermore**. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This was no mere man! And was NOT fulfilled in Isaiahs day! This was referring to the incarnation – the God-Man – Jesus!

B. Emmanuel – God with us – Today! & Forevermore!

Matthew 1:18-23 “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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). **THE SERPENT CRUSHER – Kaden Tremaine – MUG!!**

Jesus was the TRUE fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy! born of a virgin! A man! But also God! ONLY HE COULD DEFEAT THE SERPENT AND REVERSE THE CURSE!!! This is our HOPE TODAY & FOREVERMORE!

THIS IS WHAT WE ARE CELEBRATING at Christmas – the birth of the Serpent Crusher – Prince of Peace – Mighty God – Everlasting Father – King of Kings! GOD IS WITH US!

1. What has your focus this Christmas season? (write it down – pause – let everyone think)

- JOY – FUN – CELEBRATION – GATHERINGS – PRESENTS!! YAY!!
- Mental health – are you ok? Are you feeling trapped?
- Alone – loneliness and isolation literally kills us. It ruins our health physically and emotionally.
- Addicted – do you feel trapped in a secret sin?
- Stuck in shame? Feel unlovable?

Christmas isn't just about family gatherings, busyness, and exchanging gifts! (though these things can ALL be GOOD GIFTS)

Do you think Jesus doesn't see you and what you are going through? The FATHER understands LOSS – The SON understands what it means to BE BROKEN. Jesus understands temptation. He was willing to limit himself to human form, take your punishment, and make a way – just so YOU could be redeemed and restored in relationship with him!

2. REFOCUS onto Emmanuel: I do not want to minimize anyone's difficulties! Or the giants you are facing! NO! **We must TRAIN our hearts to focus on the TRUTH OF EMMANUEL and ALL that it means for us TODAY & FOREVERMORE!**

- a. **Gratitude & Praise – praise Jesus for 3 things daily**
- b. **Meditate & memorize Scripture – Passages about who God is and how he relates to us**
- c. **Be a Messenger (like Isaiah) – Share Jesus, serve, bless & encourage others!**

PRACTICE: Isaiah 8:11-14 This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people: “Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread. He will be a holy place; for both Israel and Judah he will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

- **The Lord said to Isaiah as he faced Assyrian invasion: 1. My hand is on you!, 2. Don't follow the way of the world, 3. Don't get caught up in conspiracies, 4. Do not fear the giants you are facing, 5. Focus on God Almighty! 6. Fear him alone! 7. God is your holy place! A refuge!**

Philippians 2:3 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 3:1-2 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Despite our failures – HE MADE A WAY THAT COULD KNOW HIM!

John 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

For hundreds of years the Jewish people longed for Emmanuel! **The first coming!**

Now, we join with believers around the world as we too, long, for Jesus to return! **The Second coming!**

When you understand the lengths that God went through for US to BE WITH US – You will understand the lyrics of the song O HOLY NIGHT – THE SOUL FELT IT’S WORTH!! YES!! In Christ we find our true value!

The truth of EMMANUEL is one of many PROOFS of GODs intention to SAVE, RESTORE & HEAL US! We experience a TASTE of this NOW → but our HOPE is in the FOREVERMORE!! This is why we can have HOPE this season REGARDLESS of what we are facing!

AFTER SERVICE PRAYER – PRAYER ROOM – 9AM and 11AM

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

MARANATHA!! Come soon Lord!

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SC CHURCH WIDE PRAYER REQUESTS 2023

Cruise ship → → → → → Battleship

- 1. Life on Mission** (Mt 28:18-20, Mt 22:37-40): Love, serve & disciple people to Jesus
- 2. Next Gen** (Ps 78:7-8): Encounters with Jesus, strong mental health, boldness & belonging
- 3. Persecuted Church** (Lk 21:13): Faith, fortitude & wisdom “to not waste the opportunity to share the Gospel”
- 4. Heart of Prayer** (Ps 27:4): Every generation to find Jesus & learn to bring their needs to Him in prayer
- 5. Church Renewal:** Directors for India and other new countries & many global disciple makers