Emmanuel – God With Us [ONE]

1. I love Christmas. I love the songs, the feeling, the excitement. Though blunted recently by Covid, politics, and division, Christmas is still special. To Christians, it is even more special as it is Advent, a celebration of the time God descended and took on human form. A babe in a manger. Peace on earth.

2. But this isn't God's first Advent. He's been entwined with human history from the moment He began it. To understand just how intimately He has been involved requires us to look at some passages that seem to contradict each other. [TWO] John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1st Tim. 6:14.

3. And, yet, God does show up in the OT. How do we reconcile this? And what do we do with 1 Cor. 10:1-3? [THREE]

4. This morning, we will have a different kind of Advent sermon. This morning, we are going to look at a God Who is with us…and always has been. First, let's remember another name for God. [FOUR] John 1:1-4.

5. God shows up in the OT and, yet, we are told that no one has seen him. First Corinthians says Christ was with the Jews as they returned home from Egypt. And then, there is another being mentioned several times in the OT – the Angel of the Lord.

6. We are hamstrung by our language and the languages used by translators. The language used by Jesus was Aramaic and there are scriptures written in Aramaic which survive to this day. We call them "targums." When we read them, all of the seeming contradictions disappear and something wondrous appears.

7. Genesis 16:7-13 is the first appearance of the Angel of the Lord. He appears to Hagar, a woman outside of the covenant and in deep distress. He promises her many children and a lasting legacy. She understands that she is talking to God and refers to Him as "the God who sees me." In the targums, it reads this way: "And she gave thanks to the Lord whose Word spoke to her." [FIVE]

8. In another targum, it adds “And Hagar gave thanks and prayed in the Name of the Word of the Lord who had been manifested to her.”

9. She had seen the warrior king, the one who came to save people like her. He is described in Revelation 19:11-16. “The Word of God”

10. In Genesis 18, the Angel of the Lord appears again. He tells Abraham about the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they are leaving, this angel stops and asks the other angels “Shall I keep from Abraham what I am about to do?”

11. In Genesis 22, it is the Angel of the Lord who stops Abram from sacrificing Isaac on the mountain…the very mountain where that very Angel will die on day. The Jerusalem Targum reads in Genesis 22:8 “The Word of the Lord will prepare for me a lamb.”

12. I’ll move through these quickly, but we will come back to them in a couple of weeks. In Genesis 32, Jacob says he wrestled with God. The targums say he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord. When Jacob later blesses his sons in Genesis 48:15-16, he refers to God as “the Angel that delivered me.”

13. In Exodus 3, it is the Angel of the Lord who speaks to Moses out of the burning bush…but, for the rest of the passage, he is said to be God. When Stephen preaches before the Sanhedrin in the Book of Acts, he refers to this Angel as the Messenger of God. In Isaiah, Jesus was given that name: “Messenger of great council” (Septuagint)

14. Moses asks this angel his name and the Angel replies: “I am that I am.”

15. Many centuries later, a child would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Born in controversy, rejected by the fine, upstanding, religious leaders and the learned ones, everything about his life was challenged and debated right in front of him. Foremost among those questions was his ancestry, his genealogy.

Reading: John 8:53-58 [SIX] He has always been Emmanuel.