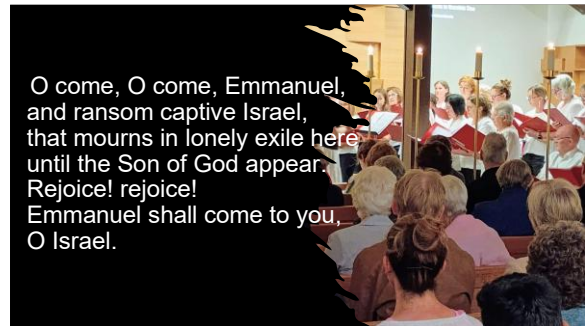


Immanuel – God is surely with us

Bible reference for sermon Matthew 1:18-25

“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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Through Advent we often sing the hymn “O come O come Immanuel” Its one of my favourites to sing in the lead up to Christmas. I find that it puts me in the right place spiritually in the midst of all the hustle and bustle that Christmas and life can be in a western developed society, an affluent society such as ours.



We have expectations about Christmas. It's a major celebration perhaps to plan for carefully so that it can be well celebrated.

Perhaps its major time for family and there are gifts to be wrapped and celebrations to prepare for.

Perhaps it just represents a time of rest from the rigors or work or whatever life demands.

Perhaps its hard to be enthused about because life doesn't seem worth celebrating. It's a time of deep grief or lack of hope. The events of Bondi last Sunday and the senseless taking of innocent lives. How do we make sense and what do we hold on to?

Together we sing, “O Come O Come Immanuel”



And will Immanuel come? Do you expect that Immanuel will actually come for and to you?

When Jesus says to his disciples

“Go and make disciples of all nationsand “I am with you always” can we trust him and expect him to come and be with us always?

When we are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as we saw and as we heard and as we celebrated today as Jaxon was baptised...do we trust the word of God and expect Jesus to do as he says and come to be with us?

In a lifetime however long or short on this earth we might hear scores, hundreds, thousands of human promises many of which are never kept or are even ever likely to be kept. We can easily come to the conclusion that only we know best. If anything is to happen in this life I can only trust me and my judgments...

There's a temptation to retreat from the world and from God, to rely on ourselves and ultimately this was the sin of Adam and Eve. We don't need God. We are god. Can we put our faith in Jesus?

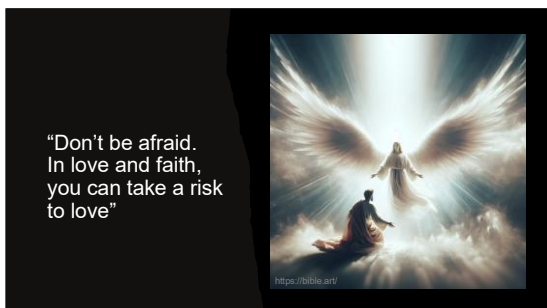
God sends his angel for us to hear..."and you will call his name "Jesus" the angel says to Joseph for he will save his people from their sins.

This Jesus comes even on the rough ride of life in risky love to be born for you and to go to suffer and die on a cross for you. For on that cross he exchanges the punishment you and I deserve for sin. And he promises and gives us the forgiveness of almighty God and the promise and gift of eternal life. And this gift as we saw today is given freely in baptism.

Do you trust him with our lives?

Will Immanuel come to us?

For Joseph a scandal is in the making. The woman, Mary, he is engaged to is pregnant. He wants to do the right, decent thing. He's a man of the law and the law says divorce her quietly and move on.



But God through the messenger angel says ,
"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."

Like many of God's announcements such as angels announcing the birth to terrified shepherds, "**don't be afraid**" is the starting point of faith and love and trust. Joseph, son Of David, **do not be afraid** to love and to take human risks in loving where God has promised. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:



“Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.”

What will Joseph do with this promise...with this promise in the face of what the law demands? In the face of his fears for himself and for Mary? Will he take a risk in love because God has promised and is with him.

Will he hold on to the promise even in the face of public scandal and fear and shame?
What would you do?

What will you do with the promise the Word of the Lord that he is with you spoken in holy baptism...in the public forgiveness of sins, in the Word proclaimed and the Word which invites you to “Come to the banquet for this is my body today for you...this is my blood in the new covenant I make with you God says. Will you receive the gifts in faith and risk in love so that others may know the promise of God for them too?

Mathew tells us “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took Mary as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Joseph believed the promise and took the risk of love.

I have lots to learn from the faith of Joseph and of Mary.

God gave the promise, took the risk of love and delivered.. God is indeed with us on the journey



When I was diagnosed with cancer recently and shared the news with you, I wondered about God and his promises. Where is this Immanuel you speak of God? But of course he soon showed me in so many messages of love and care and encouragement that God is faithful and is wonderfully pastorally in every moment.

I came to realize that as people like you shared your love and your own struggles in life that Immanuel comes to us in Word and in Sacrament but also the promise comes in frail human form; in the shape of many persons who also were recipients of the promise. God came to me in the hearts and messages of love from people like you who trusting the promise brought it alive for me and shared with me the hard things of life for me to pray about.

People like Joseph taking the risk of loving because of the promise of God.

People like Mary who received the promise and accepted it in faith and went on the journey.

I want to share with you one such message which showed me the wonderful presence of Immanuel for me. This text message came as I was reading Isaiah 11 as I prepared a sermon. Isaiah 11:6 reads

The wolf shall live with
the lamb;
the leopard shall lie
down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will
feed together,
and a little child shall
lead them.

Isaiah 11:6



Now, of course, we know the child to whom this refers to is Jesus. But this child too comes to us in surprising and amazing ways just like at his birth.

I knew Jesus' presence for me pastorally from a special little Christian child recently in a really turbulent time when God's promises had seemed a long way away. His mum wrote me a message:

"Thank you for your vulnerability this morning in sharing your circumstances. God loves you and whatever the next chapter brings, He is with you and Sue and all of us. (The three of us) love you deeply and are so grateful God brought our lives together.

But here's the thing. This little man has his own health struggles. So his message touched my heart deeply...His mum writes

If he had the eloquence, James might encourage you to have a childlike faith and, when it feels hard, bring yourself into the present moment and appreciate each moment for



the gift it is. He finds making bubbles is a useful way to do this, even on a hard day. In his simple words, "so many bubbles!" Love (Simon, Caitlin and James) xx"

When you leave the church today there's a small gift from James and I of bubbles for you to take home to help us to live and appreciate each moment and the promise of God for us. Emmanuel – God is with us for life.

And as you remember the promise, you might like to blow some bubbles with us and to know that it is in sometimes risky love that you make a difference.

As we sit after the Bondi massacre and the fear and terror of it, we are encouraged like Joseph to receive the promise and love, even when its risky. Because this is how we change community culture where racism remains in this country and this is how we bring God's love to the world.

After 30 years of ministry I know this for sure: God comes to us surely as a community in worship in his Word and acts of promise in baptism, absolution and the Supper and God comes in the most beautiful and often surprising ways to us and through us in the risky love of frail humans like us.

Will Immanuel come? ...

Rejoice rejoice! Immanuel

Shall come to you O Israel.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>