



GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

December 13, 2020 *The Incarnate Title: Emmanuel*

Scripture:

“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 1:20-23

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

A sign in Isaiah’s time; a reality in Jesus

MONDAY 12.15.14 Isaiah 7:5-16, Matthew 1:22-23

Three kings were plotting to attack Israel, and King Ahaz was frightened. The prophet Isaiah said to ask for a sign that God was with him. The stubborn king refused, but Isaiah gave him a sign anyway—a young woman would give birth to a son. Before the boy reached *bar mitzvah* age—age 13), the plotting kingdoms would lose their power (and they did). Matthew said Mary’s son completed Isaiah’s prophecy by being God’s presence for all people. (For a more detailed study, see Pastor Hamilton’s book *Making Sense of the Bible*, pp. 56-60.)

- Matthew 18:20 quoted Jesus as saying, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.” And the gospel’s final verse, Matthew 28:20, carried the promise that “I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.” What settings or practices help to make God’s presence real to you? What makes God’s presence as important for you (and each one of us) as it was for King Ahaz?
- Scholar William Barclay summed up Matthew’s message: “Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is like, and what God means us to be. In him alone we see what God is and what man ought to be.” In what ways have you been able to make Jesus central to your understanding of what God is like? Has that helped you to avoid some of the negative, frightening images of God some people have? If so, how?

Prayer: O Lord, on that first Christmas you came into our midst. You were human, but you were also more. Give me insight and humility as I grapple to internalize the mystery that you were Emmanuel, “God with us.” Amen.

Life: from eternity to where we could see and touch it

TUESDAY 12.16.14 1 John 1:1-3

John used lofty, nearly ecstatic language as he reflected (probably several decades later) on his experience of knowing and following Jesus. Commentator Glenn Barker captured John's central point: "This message is from the beginning because it is of God. It precedes creation, time, and history. But in God the message of life also draws near to humanity and finds its culmination in Jesus. In him the Word of life becomes incarnated [made flesh], manifested, and hence can be seen, touched, and even handled."

- John's claim was (and is) amazing. He said he had heard, seen, looked at and touched "the Word of life" which was "from the beginning": i.e. God, the creator and savior! How can John's simple, direct eyewitness testimony give you a firmer basis for your faith? How, without the same physical experience John had of Jesus, have you been able to trust that Jesus is "the eternal life that was with the Father"?
- John wrote that sharing the good news about Jesus as "God with us" draws us into fellowship (community) with one another and with God. Do you value connections with people that have come about because of your shared faith in Jesus? How can you keep your heart and life open to inviting others into this worldwide, centuries-old fellowship?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes I think of you as a figure in a painting or a statue. But witnesses like John said they actually knew you as a real man. Help me to grasp, and live out, the reality that you are still really with me today. Amen.

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me"

WEDNESDAY 12.17.14 John 14:7-11

The gospel of John began with language similar to that we read in 1 John: "No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known" (John 1:18). John did not invent such words about Jesus out of thin air. He recorded that Jesus himself, on the night before his crucifixion, told the disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

- In some Bible stories, God sounds angry, brutal or unloving. Those stories may reflect human misunderstanding, shaped by ancient culture, or perhaps loving acts that only seem unloving to us because of our partial understanding. But in Jesus, who came to be "lifted up" on the cross so we can have eternal life, we find the definitive picture of God's heart. Has knowing Jesus reshaped any of your images of God? How deeply are you able to trust the truth of Jesus' saying?
- Jesus asked, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time?" It is still possible to go to church for many years, to know many facts about the Bible and the church, and yet not know Jesus. For how much time have you been around Jesus and his message? In what ways do you wish to grow deeper in knowing Jesus, not just knowing about him?

Prayer: O Jesus, Revelation paints a picture of you knocking at the door of my heart, seeking leave to enter. This Advent season, I seek to open that door more widely to you than ever before, to commit myself to knowing you. Amen.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God”

THURSDAY 12.18.14 Colossians 1:13-20

The poetic words of verses 15-20 appear to be the lyrics to an early Christian hymn in honor of Jesus. Like other first-century Christian writing, these verses did not seek to explain the mystery that the human Jesus was “God with us.” They simply stated it as the reality that Paul and the early believers said was transforming their lives. “All the fullness of God” lived in him, said this joyous hymn. He truly was “God with us.”

- If we focus on the stories that usually lead the news, we might wonder what the final line of the Christ hymn is supposed to mean: “He brought peace through the blood of his cross.” Too often, in homes, companies or nations, we try to bring about peace by changing external conditions while leaving hearts unchanged. In what ways has Jesus brought peace into your life “from the inside out”? How have you seen that kind of peace transform alienation and pain into renewed relationships?
- Rector Dick Lucas wrote that “If [Col. 1:15-20] was a spiritual song along the lines of Colossians 3:16, it would make the teaching hymns of even a Charles Wesley appear lightweight.” Review the hymn’s lyrical lines, noting all of the qualities and actions of Jesus they name. Which of them mean the most to you? Which of them would you like to understand better?

Prayer: Lord God, you are so much grander and greater than I am—yet you want me to know you. Thank you for coming in Jesus to show me a clear image of what you are like. Amen.

God with us—in humble service and suffering

FRIDAY 12.19.14 Philippians 2:5-8

Jesus was not the kind of “king” people expected. He was not the kind of “savior” human wisdom wished for. And he was also not “God with us” in the way we might expect God to come. Today’s reading, another early Christian hymn, honored Jesus, but not by starting with his power or majesty. It praised his willingness to “empty himself” (the literal meaning of the Greek in 2:7) for us. Jesus did not demand divine prerogatives, but came to serve, and even to suffer.

- The *New International Reader’s Version* sums up well this hymn’s view of the depth of Jesus’ descent: “He came down to the lowest level. He obeyed God completely, even though it led to his death.” Pastor Bill Hybels wrote a book called *Descending into Greatness* based on this passage. Does that kind of “career path” (or “life path”) strike you as backward, or do you sense the power that it carries? How does this deepen your understanding of what it means to want to “be like Jesus”?
- Scholar H. C. Hewlett said “humility” means “the recognition of our true littleness as those dependent utterly on God.” That differs from yielding outwardly while being irate inside about someone else “winning” or depriving you of a treasured “perk.” How can that kind of humility, modeled by Jesus, open your heart to God’s love? How can it clear away inner barriers that may block us from loving one another?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the old hymn says you could have called 10,000 angels to take you off the cross. But you didn’t—you chose to save me rather than preserve your own comfort or dignity. Help me to have your attitude in my daily life. Amen.

“God’s dwelling is here with humankind”—forever

SATURDAY 12.20.14 Revelation 5:6-13, 21:1-5

Jesus wasn’t “God with us” just for a few first-century years. He pledged to remain with us in the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16-18). More than that, Revelation’s amazing symbolic vision said that by his life, death and resurrection Jesus, “the slaughtered Lamb,” made God’s presence with us a reality for all of eternity. No matter what life throws at us, we can live, like those first Christians, trusting that THIS is where history is going: “He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

- The symbols in Revelation 5 can seem bizarre at first (e.g. a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes?). To people with Hebrew backgrounds, the number “seven” meant “complete” or “perfect.” These images said that Jesus, perfect in power (7 horns) and able to perfectly “see” what you need (7 eyes) is the Lamb of God, the center of all true worship now and forever. In what ways have these Advent studies deepened your understanding of Jesus as your true king, as your savior, and as God with us? How fully are you able to join in singing, “Blessing, honor, glory, and power belong to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb forever and always”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to grow more comfortable and trusting in your presence each day, so that I can look forward with greater joy and hope to being with you through all eternity. Amen.

Family Activity: One title of Jesus is Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Whether in disappointment or joy, we can always trust God to be present. Gather as a family in a favorite room in your home. Talk about why that particular room is a favorite. Is it extra comfortable? Does it have more light? Now move together to the least favorite room in your home (maybe the garage or laundry room). Discuss why it is the least favorite. Is it dark? Dirty? Back in the comfortable room, talk about where each person experiences God’s presence most deeply. Ask each person to choose one uncomfortable or unfamiliar place this week to spend some time remembering God is always present with everyone, everywhere. Pray and thank God for always being with each one of you.