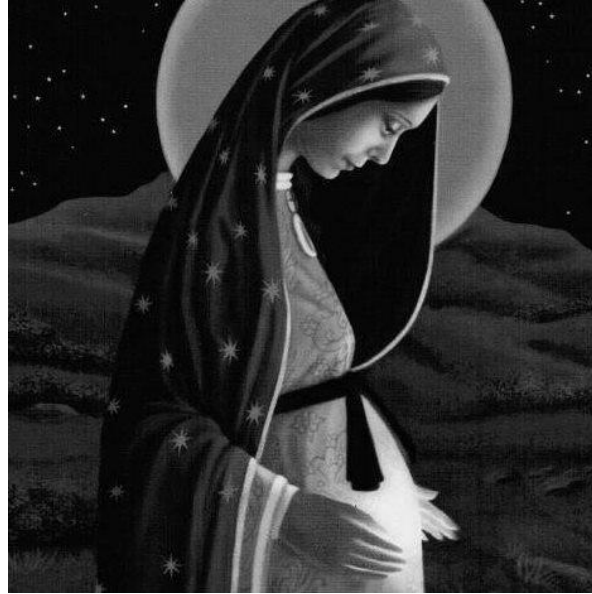


## EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US!



**Scripture:**

**Isaiah 7:10-14**

<sup>10</sup>Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup>Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. <sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

**Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## **EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US**

The scriptures last week focused on Mary and Elizabeth. Now this week Joseph enters the scene. Let's listen to some of Mary's thoughts as she is dealing with her mysterious pregnancy and preparing to travel to Bethlehem with Joseph.

(Cassie Carroll read the next section from the narthex.)

"There will be no donkey, and especially not a little donkey. I'm eight and half months pregnant now. I couldn't swing my leg over its back! And if I sat side-saddle, I'd probably fall off! And if I stayed on, the donkey's walking might trigger my contractions!

Now, if only, Joseph could afford a camel.... But Joseph can't afford a camel. So I am going to walk.

Eighty miles, eighty pregnant miles, to register, to pay the head tax.

I don't know what it will be like... And since Joseph left the town when he was just a toddler, he can't remember either.

I ask you...Would any of you who are women want to walk this eighty miles, when your time has come to give birth? In who knows where? To a child who is a source of consternation to his parents before he is even born? And who will be a controversy to the world ever after?

When I was a girl, I used to love playing practical jokes. All our neighbors would roar and laugh, and say to my mother, "Where does she get her sense of humor?"

Sometimes when I think of the mess Joseph and I are in, I smile to myself and realize that I get my sense of humor from my Maker."

(End of Cassie's reading.)

## **GOD HAS A SENSE OF HUMOR**

God, our maker has a sense of humor? Just take a look at the platypus and we can

confirm that yes, God must have a sense of humor!

Where does God's sense of humor shine in Advent? In the straggly shepherds approaching the manger? Among the many animals surrounding Christ's birthing station?

Humor during Advent? They say the best relationships are those where at least one of the people involved can step back and see the humor in the midst of tense situations, and then use that humor to provide a sense of hope for the future.

God's hope came to earth in a humble birth and showed us through the way of Jesus what the kingdom of God looks like.

## **WE ARE ALL BEARERS OF GOD**

Meister Eckhart, a medieval philosopher and mystic, saw Mary's assent to give birth to the Son of God as a crucial moment.

**Eckhart wrote that  
"We all flow out of God our Creator.  
God is perpetually creating us;  
we are living in the mind of God and  
always being stretched and shaped."  
Eckhart said,  
Mary gives spiritual birth to God, and  
now God is eternally borne.  
That's pretty deep. Think about that.  
We are all bearers of God.  
Theotokus in Greek  
means God bearer.**

But Joseph was confused; he was bewildered in a mixture of hurt and suspicion. How could this be? Mary herself uttered those words when the angel visited her to announce the miraculous birth. Now an angel had appeared to Joseph.

Matthew tells us that when Joseph awoke, and did as he was told. Joseph realized that God was at work in the mysterious things happening to Mary. God's

act of new creation was coming forth in Jesus,

The child was to be named “Jesus.” It means “God saves.” Jesus—God saves, also known as: Immanuel—God with us. We can think of it as “God saves us from our own self-destructive ways by being with us, and showing us the “way” to be.”

### **ADVENT**

Advent is Latin for “adventus” which means: arrival, appearance, emergence, birth, rise, or development.

**Advent calls us to prepare a way within us and in the world around us to receive the Christ-child.**

We remember him as a baby born in a stable because his laboring mother was turned away from safe shelter. We remember him as a refugee whose parents crossed the border into Egypt to protect him from violence. To prepare a way for Jesus is to create safe places for him to live, to protect him from the violence that threatens him.

The baby for whom we wait this Advent bears his good news into the world even before he can speak. We hear it in the lengths his parents went to protect him, the miles the Magi traveled to honor him, the awe of the shepherds who heard his birth announced by an angel, the assurance of the angel that this was good news for all people.

Advent illuminates the Christ Child’s face at borders where refugees seek safe passage, in rural and urban places of poverty and despair, in prisons, and in places where people are segregated and neglected.

In every Advent there is much at stake. We have an opportunity to recalibrate our lives and our commitments in the light of God’s vision. It is one of the greatest

blessings of our faith that God never tires of inviting us to celebrate Advent once again.

Christ came to give us a foretaste of the kingdom of God. Christ’s Advent appears in our caring for the earth and for one another. Christ shows up as we serve and protect the world and advocate justice for the oppressed.

This is what Christ came to show us, even in our deepest darkness days. Christ’s light bursts forth as the glory of God in the flesh to show us that hope, joy, peace and love are not just for the future someday. They are to happen now. Advent is when, in the midst of the darkness of winter all around us, we open our hearts to Jesus, Emmanuel who comes and saves and is always with us. God’s greatest gift to us every year is the light of hope, the Prince of Peace, the joyful promise, and the embodiment of love in action. No greater gift has ever been given.

So let’s ponder in our hearts a little more, God’s sense of humor, which probably helped Mary cope with her blessed and difficult role as the God bearer, giving birth to our Lord, in the bleak midwinter.

I think kids are the best at creating joy and adding humor to the Christmas story. A video of children enactment of the nativity was shown to the congregation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suowe2czxcA&feature=youtu.be>

### **SERVING OTHERS**

I am so proud of being a part of this church, especially at Christmas, when I get to see and advocate for all that this church does to serve others. We gave the Boys and Girls Club much needed supplies through the Giving Tree program. Forty Vietnam Veterans received wonderful food boxes and at least thirty food bags were given out from our front office this month! We raised over \$2,500.00 in Alternative Gift market gifts

for orphans and refugees and those in need of free medical care.

And we showed hospitality to the Rosebud Preschool, the Voena Children's Choir, the Boy Scouts, and the Handicapables group, who all had lovely Christmas parties here. We provided hot breakfasts for one-hundred or more high school students each day and added a Christmas gift card this year so they could buy a gift from Lucky's market for their families.

Our Christmas Cantata this afternoon will bring great joy to people through the gift of beautiful music and raise money for FISH.

This church is a giving, welcoming church throughout the whole year, but it does an especially good job at remembering the real reason for the season and acting Christ-like with love in action at Christmas. What a blessing this church is to not only us in this special church family, but to all those we reach out and touch. Thousands of people feel blessed by this church that takes seriously the call to be an instrument of God's peace. Thank you to all here who helped make the giving and the hospitality possible!

**Benediction:**

**So when you go home and the humor of God seems far away, and Christmas at your place just doesn't seem as perfect as all the gifts and fancy food you see on TV remember these words:**

**Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small, was singing! Without any presents at all!**

**The Grinch hadn't stopped Christmas from coming it came! Somehow or other it came just the same! And the Grinch, with his Grinch feet ice cold in the snow stood puzzling and puzzling: "How could it be so?" It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes, or bags!"**

**And he puzzled three hours til his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store! Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more!**

**You have already received the best gift ever given: the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, will be with you now and forever more! Amen!**



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