



## Isaiah 7:10-14, Matt 1:23

*Isaiah 7:10 Again the LORD spoke to King Ahaz, 11 "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." 13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Immanuel. It's a name associated with Jesus and with this season of the year. As you can tell from the graphic behind me, you can see what Immanuel means: "God with us" Matt 1: 23

CHRISTMAS Here are some pictures that we often associate with Christmas. They are the bits we don't like – shopping hell, road crashes, arguing families, drunken youths. WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS? Sadly some of us already know what this sort of Christmas feels like. For many, it can be a time of increased domestic violence, increased traffic accidents and an increase of calls to the Samaritans. What might the Christmas story of the Bible offer to help a people in trouble? BLANK

The reading I gave you was written VERSE around 740 years before Jesus was born, a prophet called Isaiah spoke some strange words to King Ahaz of Judah, AHAZ encouraging him not to be afraid of the armies of Israel and Syria in the north who were threatening to invade. Ahaz had abandoned faith in God and was into a form of paganism that involved child sacrifice. God challenged Ahaz to just trust Him – give Him a try! Ahaz refused. God's patience was tried by Ahaz and some of his successors so much that He destroyed their country – but the promise came as well that there would be a time when God Himself would intervene as a human being VERSE The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isa 7: 14) The promise of "Immanuel" became associated with the future hope of a Messiah. RED But what kind of Messiah would he be? How might God be with us in a troubled world?

### SHARING OUR HUMAN FRAILTY

As we look at Bethlehem's manger, we see the vulnerability of God. We gaze upon the fragility of a new born child, and see a life that could be so easily snuffed out in seconds. John described this baby in his gospel as the word made flesh (John 1: 14). This is no plastic imitation, no imagination! In a later letter, John described him as that which was from the beginning which we have heard, seen and our hands have touched. (1 John 1: 1-3) So what does this mean for God to be with us in our frailty and vulnerability? What does it mean for God to be with us in our physical weakness, our mental anguish and turmoil? The writer to the Hebrews said, we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses. (Heb 4: 15) Immanuel, God-with-us empathises fully with our weaknesses. For NT Christians, Christ's identification with us was of immense significance. For example, his victory over death is described in Hebrews 2: 14. He too shared their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death.

### SHARING OUR FAMILY SITUATIONS

Jesus was not born into a vacuum but into a human family. He was just a bloke in an ordinary family with an ordinary job not some prince, or rich merchant – or a city banker! He was a practical guy – a carpenter. And like our families His was also full of family pressure.

THIS WAS A TROUBLED FAMILY . There was probably talk of people "having to get married" (Matt 1: 18) though this is not such a big deal today, but it was then!

THIS WAS A POOR FAMILY . It was a refugee family forced to flee because of ethnic cleansing. (Matt 2: 14) It was possibly accentuated later by Joseph's disappearance from the scene. Most scholars believe he died before Jesus' ministry.

THIS WAS A FAMILY WITH ITS TENSIONS . Even his own brothers did not believe in him at first (John 7: 5) until after the resurrection. (Acts 1: 14) Do you long to see unbelieving members of your family come to believe? Jesus did too! The Son of God didn't come into an ideal family situation but a real one 'warts and all'. I know that some of us may have had a very difficult year eg illness, trauma, bereavement, anxiety and it's tempting to think everyone else has got it together except me. This is far from true. The truth is we are not alone. We have a God-with-us who brings hope and encouragement in the struggles of everyday family life! He's been there, done it - and still has the wounds to show for it!

### SHARING OUR SUFFERING

No child deserves to be born in a cattle shed and laid in an animal feeding trough - let alone the Son of God. (Luke 2: 7). Immediately his physical well-being was under threat - with attempts on his life. (Matt 20) No privileges for him only persecution! Do you sometimes agonise, "Why Lord Why?" Well so did Jesus. (Hebrews 5: 7) During the days of his life, he offered up prayers with loud cries and tears.

Immanuel, God-with-us certainly didn't mean an absence of suffering, especially for Jesus. But God is faithful and he will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, but when you are tempted will also find a way so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor 10: 13) He shares it with us and gives us the strength to press on. CROSS

### Forgiving our sin

However, the first name given to this baby was Jesus. You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins Matt 1: 21 Immanuel, God-with-us is not just about identification, but also about rescue and deliverance. Whilst for some, Christmas may be the 'season from hell'; the message of Immanuel is one that offers us a Saviour from heaven.

### CROSS 2

Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. (1 Tim 1: 15) God didn't come just to stand alongside us but to take our place. In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah what a Saviour!

### 2 PETER VERSE

This was God's intention from the start. The Lamb slain from the creation of the world. (Rev 13: 8) God-with-us is inextricably bound up with salvation from sin. GIVE ME A TRY The sad thing was that, when Immanuel was first spoken of people did not listen AHAZ and consequently suffered a most awful judgement. PEOPLE WHAT ABOUT US? We need to take care we don't make the same mistake.

As Christmas approaches, may we hear again that word of hope, Immanuel God-with-us. This is a word of hope to all who will welcome God's gift of his Son - to all who will open their lives to Jesus as saviour. GIVE HIM A TRY PRAY - PRAYER TEAM The good news of Christmas is that it is not just a story of what happened 2,000 years ago. We can know that God is with us today in every situation.

We can be assured this Christmas that he shares our human frailty, our family situations, our suffering and above all forgives our sins.

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*MRBC Felixstowe 20/12/09*

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