



Immanuel- God with us

Study Four



Mary & Joseph seeking refuge in Bethlehem, Simon de Vos, 1664

Opening Psalm : Restoration

(Read Psalm 80:1-7,17-19)



*'Restore us, Lord God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.'* (v. 19)

This is a communal prayer for a community seeking God's help after a disaster, but its words and emotion also reveal a strong personal relationship between a people and God their Shepherd, despite past sins.

But now, surrounded by hardship and feeling abandoned, they plead for God's mercy and rescue, with words that capture the honesty of a people who know their own weaknesses and sins, and now long for God's restoring power.

Verse 17 mentions 'the son of man you have raised up for yourself', and Christians have long seen these words as looking forward to Jesus, the Son of Man who comes as God's answer to our own cries for restoration.

The psalm ends with hope: 'Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.' Advent reminds us that God has not forgotten his people. In Jesus, he comes to rescue, revive, and lead us into new life.

For a weary world, this is the good news of Advent: God hears our cry, and in Christ, he restores us.

A sign of hope

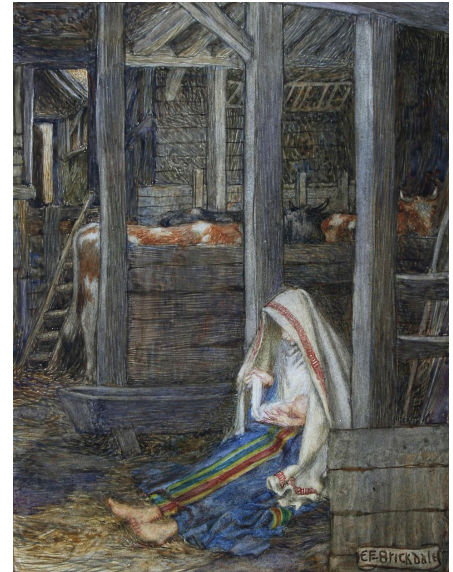
(Read Isaiah 7:10-16)



'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.' (v. 14b)

Ahaz's reign as king of Judah had been one of unfaithfulness - sacrificing to foreign gods such as Baal, and engaging in child sacrifices. Now Jerusalem was under attack and God sends Isaiah to meet Ahaz and offer reassurance and a sign that all is not lost. Ahaz refuses to listen, not out of faith, but fear and pride. So, God gives a sign anyway, 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.'

In its original setting, this sign was meant to remind Ahaz and the people that God had not abandoned them. Immanuel means God with us - a promise that even in a time of crisis, God's presence is sure. Yet Ahaz struggled to trust, preferring political alliances over reliance on God.



Eleonor Fortescue-Brickdale - The Nativity c1900

Beyond its original context, this prophesy finds even greater fulfilment in Advent. Matthew quotes it in his Gospel to show that in the birth of Jesus, God's ultimate sign has come - God is with us, not just in promise but in person.

Advent invites us into this tension between present troubles and future hope. Like Ahaz, we often face fear and uncertainty. Do we trust in our own strength, or in God's presence? The good news of Advent is that God has given the sign we need. In Christ, Immanuel has come.

God is with us always

(Read Matthew 1:18-25)



'She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' (v. 21)

Matthew brings us to the heart of the season with the story of Jesus' birth from the perspective of Joseph, when he discovers that Mary is pregnant. The law gives him options, including quietly ending the engagement, but after God's intervention in a dream he chooses faith and love, trusting that Mary's pregnancy is indeed God's will, fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy.

This is the heart of Advent. The longings of Israel and the promises of God meet in the birth of Jesus. God is no longer distant but comes close, sharing our humanity, our joys, and our struggles. In Jesus, God is with us not only in moments of peace and celebration, but also in fear, confusion, and weakness. For Joseph, obedience meant stepping into uncertainty, but it was through trust that he experienced God's presence and purpose.

Advent closes with this assurance: God is with us. Not just as a memory of Bethlehem, and not only as a future hope when Christ returns, but here and now, in the mess and beauty of everyday life. That is the good news we carry into Christmas and beyond - Immanuel, God with us, always.



'Joseph's Dream', Gaetano Gandolfi

'Advent invites us to live in the tension of what has been and what will be.'
(Rowan Williams)

'Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem. May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man. (Pope Francis)

'The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.'
(C S Lewis)



Lutheran Advent wreath Christ Candle Lit, picture by Kittelendian

A prayer

Gracious God, we thank You for guiding us
through this season of Advent—
a season of hope, peace, joy, and love.

In our waiting, You have reminded us that Your promises are sure.
In our doubts, You have shown us signs of Your kingdom
breaking in. And in our longing, You have given us the
greatest gift:

Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.
As we step into Christmas,
fill our hearts with the hope that Christ brings,
the peace that calms our fears,
the joy that lifts our spirits,
and the love that overflows to others.

May we carry the light of Christ into a weary world,
trusting that You are with us now and always,
until the day when Your kingdom comes in
fullness. Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and
Lord.

Amen.