

God is with us \* Matthew 1:18-25  
Langford Church \* Christmas Eve 2021 \* Graham Gladstone

Since we've been looking at carols all through the Christmas season, I thought it would be appropriate for us to look at another one here tonight on Christmas Eve. The line comes from 'O little town of Bethlehem;' it's actually the last line of the song. It goes: 'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.'

We've sung those words hundreds of times, haven't we? Thousands of times, probably. Add up everybody sitting in these pews; you probably sing it once, maybe twice a year, and we've literally sung it thousands of times.

It struck me though as I was preparing for tonight that this line is especially important this year. Because it's been a tough road lately, hasn't it? Some of us have lost loved ones, some of us have been struggling through an especially rough season of life, some of us are heavy laden with burdens and responsibilities and all of us have been affected by the constant uncertainty that comes from COVID-19.

This line though, and the reality that lies behind it, has something very important to say to us. This line is reason to hang on, to take heart and to walk with confidence into whatever lies ahead. Let's look at it together and see why I say that.

So the line is the last line of 'O little town of Bethlehem' – 'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.'

We've heard that word 'Immanuel' already tonight, haven't we? Do you remember what it means? Matthew 1, verse 23 - 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-- which means, "God with us."

Matthew thought it was so important that we know what 'Immanuel' means that he put it right there into the text. 'Immanuel' means 'God with us.' 'Immanuel' means that that sovereign being who holds all things together is with you; He's in your corner. You can actually see it right there in the word – 'el' is part of the Hebrew word for God and the 'immanu' part means 'with us.' Immanu-el literally means that God is with us.

Which means that God is not some distant far off Deity who every so often peeks through His heavenly telescope to see what's going on on earth. It means that God is not like Santa Claus who only comes around once a year to check up on you. 'Immanuel' means that God is with us, caring for us, supporting us, 24/7, 365 days a year. God is not distant and aloof; God is with us.

Now that's conceptually true, but it's also literally true. That very first Christmas, God came into the world to literally be with us, to walk the same ground that we do, to breathe the same air, to identify with us and to experience the same things that we experience on an everyday basis. Jesus came that very first Christmas to be 'Immanuel' – literally, God with us.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He lived like we did and then died to save us – just as the angel said - and then returned to Heaven to reign from there. That doesn't mean though that He's no longer with us. Far from it. In fact, what was the very last thing He said in Matthew's Gospel? 'Behold I

am with you even to the end of the age.' God with us at the beginning, God with us at the end; God with us always.

Which means that you are not alone in that hospital room, in that waiting room. You are not alone in that conflict, in that darkness, late at night, at rock bottom. The God who made you has entered into the world that He made to be with you, to restore you to Him and to give you the unshakeable hope of eternal life. Yes, there will be trials that come our way, but God is in them with us, to preserve and to sustain and to prepare us for eternity.

So take heart. Stand firm. Don't get discouraged but know that Jesus has already gone ahead and is walking this path with you. He knows what it's like; He's been there too and He promises to be with you every step of the way.

If that's true, then why does the carol call us to invite Him in again? 'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.' Isn't He already with us? Why would we need to invite Him again? Well, the reason is that we need to make it personal. We need to actively choose in the midst of everything going on in our lives to recognize that God is there and to realize that He is bigger than whatever we face.

We need the reminder that He is *\*the Lord!\**, that we can trust and follow Him, wherever He made lead, because He is committed to being with us. And so as we sing together tonight, I want to invite you to invite Immanuel in, to let Him be Lord, and walk with you into whatever lies ahead. Take heart, for God is with you.

#### Benediction

May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.