

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A) – Matthew 1:18-25

Discipleship: *Following Emmanuel*

Focus Question: *How do you experience Emmanuel, God being with you?*

word of life

“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 1:23 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Many biblical scholars believe the original audience of Matthew’s Gospel had deep Jewish roots and was familiar with the prophecies of the Old Testament, the hopes of a Messiah, and the religious laws of the day. Like the prophets, the audience would have anticipated a future Messiah with roots in the house of David. Thus, it makes sense for the Gospel of Matthew to clarify the identity of Jesus by beginning with an extensive genealogy, tracing the lineage of Jesus from his own father Joseph to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. (See Matthew 1:1-17.)

Once the lineage of Jesus is firmly established through the genealogy, the Gospel writer Matthew shifts to establish the divine connection of Jesus to God through the birth narrative. The description of the birth of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew is quite different than the manger scene of the shepherds described in the Gospel of Luke. (See Luke 2:1-7.) Whereas Luke features the story through the eyes of Mary, Matthew focuses on Joseph’s perspective.

1. *Compare and contrast the birth narratives found in Luke 2:1-17 and Matthew 1:18-25.*

It is important to recognize the established religious laws related to a couple being engaged in the ancient world. (See sample Deut. 22:23-24.) Engagement or betrothal was a relationship of binding obligation with the possibility of divorce. Thus, as Joseph learns of Mary’s pregnancy, he feels compelled by religious law to divorce Mary. His love of God is the priority. Yet, even in this difficult circumstance, he plans not to humiliate Mary in a public way but to keep things quiet.

2. *Describe Joseph’s options in dealing with the news of the pregnancy of Mary.*
3. *What can you learn about Joseph through this passage?*

An angel appears in a dream to guide Joseph and to give him greater clarity. This is not an unusual way in Scripture for God to communicate. The angel makes it clear that Mary has not done anything wrong, but instead, she has been righteous and open to the work of the Holy Spirit in her life.

Like Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38), Joseph is open to the words of the angel and to God at work in his life. In the midst of surprising news, it should not be a surprise to hear of the obedient response of Joseph. He remains obedient to God, continues in his relationship with Mary, and gives their son the name of Jesus.

Jesus is also referred to as *Emmanuel*, God with us. This reference is only found in the Gospel of Matthew, but reflects a major theological theme. God is *uniquely present* in the life of Jesus and through the mission of the church. The Gospel of Matthew concludes with a reminder of God’s presence as well. “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20 NRSV)

4. *What is the significance of calling Jesus “Emmanuel”, God with us?*

word among us

The winter storm on Christmas Eve descended on the small town. Although warnings were issued urging drivers to stay off the roads, the pastor slowly drove to the church on Christmas Eve not knowing what to expect. He was surprised to find the parking lot had been cleared of snow, the sanctuary heater had been turned on, and the altar was prepared for Holy Communion. He could not help but smile as he felt the presence of devoted church members surrounding him. Not many were able to attend worship that night, so the worshippers decided to sit closely together in the choir loft. In the quiet of that night, they experienced God's presence.

Some who could not make it to the Christmas Eve service gathered their families together in their living rooms, lit candles, read about the birth of Jesus, and sang hymns. In the quiet of that night, they experienced God's presence.

1. *Recall a Christmas Eve worship when you experienced "Emmanuel".*
2. *When else do you experience God's presence?*

Over 2000 years ago, God chose to be present with humanity in a way never experienced before. God chose to come to earth and dwell among us. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers Mary to be the carrier of God. It is Joseph who is given the opportunity with Mary to nurture Jesus through childhood. From the beginning, Mary and Joseph knew their son to be Jesus, the one who is to save the people.

3. *Why would God choose to come and be present to us in the form of a human?*
4. *Imagine conversations between Mary and Joseph about the identity of their son Jesus. What would those conversations have been like?*
5. *Why Mary and Joseph? What makes them so special?*

Joseph is resolved about how to deal with Mary after he finds out about her pregnancy. The Gospel writer Matthew does not describe Joseph wrestling in a sleepless night and struggling with his decision. Yet, in the night, an angel appears to Joseph and cautions him not to be afraid. Joseph is persuaded to choose another course of action.

6. *Has God ever revealed something to you in a dream? Describe.*
7. *What would it take for God to persuade you to change your mind?*

We follow *Emmanuel*, God with us. *Emmanuel* does not describe only mountain-top experiences, but also the daily struggles of life. We confess God's presence with us, even in those times when it feels like God is distant and not active in our lives. And those times can occur. Life can become difficult. Our world can be turned upside down by tragedy, illness, death, loss, and broken dreams. In those times, we pray *Emmanuel*, God with us. We pray for God's presence to hold and sustain us.

8. *What can you say when someone does not feel the presence of God?*
9. *What do you do when you feel you have grown distant from God?*

Prayer

Emmanuel, fill us with your presence and remind us always that you are with us. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 7:10-16

last word

Light a candle and
invite God to be present as you pray.



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