

Fourth Sunday of Advent  
Year A - 22/12/2019

Isaiah 7:10-16  
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19  
Romans 1: 1-7  
Matthew 1:18-25

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

Today's Gospel from the opening chapter of Matthew follows directly on from his account of the genealogy of Jesus; a passage which traces Jesus' heritage back to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew race. We are presented today with 2 different, yet equally important aspects of the person of Jesus for us. In the foretelling to Joseph of the birth of the Messiah which was to come, the emphasis is on Joseph as being of the house of David. "Joseph, Son of David", the angel addresses him.

For the first readers and hearers of Matthew's Gospel, this was an important point. The author of Matthew's Gospel was a Jewish Christian. As such, writing for Jews or other Jewish Christians first and foremost, this was an affirmation for them of their roots and their heritage.

Son of David has been understood as the most Jewish of all of the titles attributed to Jesus. All throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the people are told by the Prophets of a son of King David who would deliver them.

Both Isaiah's words, and the words of the Psalmist which we hear today are examples of this. "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", says Isaiah. "Restore us", pleads the Psalmist; "let your hand be upon the one at your right hand." This is an ongoing plea which has reverberated throughout the ages, for this Son of David to come and save his people.

In a similar way, St Paul sets forth, in his introductory verses to the Letter to the Romans, a clear statement of the Davidic heritage of Jesus, who is also Son of God.

Perhaps more important, however, for us as Christians is the identification of Jesus as Emmanuel. Meaning literally ‘God with us’, this is an important theme for Matthew the Gospel writer, and one which recurs throughout the his Gospel, and pervades the writer’s message.

The theme will re-appear in the Easter narrative, where the disciples could not maintain their presence with Jesus as he prayed, in the numerous occasions where Jesus, as the presence of God on earth, reinterpreted the Law; and we find it again in his final statement to the disciples after his resurrection “I am with you always”.

The importance of the title of Emmanuel is simply this. In the child that the virgin will bear, in the son that Joseph will accept and adopt as his own, we find the presence of God. The message that the angel brings to Joseph is quite remarkable. Through the Holy Spirit, God will be born of Mary, God in human form, to dwell on earth, to share in human life, its joys and pleasures, but also its pain and sorrow.

The presence of God on earth is something that we, as Christians, should celebrate. More than that, it should be a comfort to us. For, in Jesus, there is nothing that God has not experienced already. No emotion, no indecision, no doubt, no pain, nothing. In difficult times in my life, when things seem very dark, as they sometimes do, this is a great comfort to me.

This is no glib promise of “you’ll be right, get over it, deal with it.” Rather, in the creator of the universe choosing to send his Son to earth, this is a statement that says to me, “I know. Not only do I understand, not only have I been there, but I am there with you now.”

For Emmanuel does not just mean God with us as in Jesus living for 33 years almost 2000 years ago. Emmanuel means God with us; *now*; *forever*. It is the promise that says “it’s all right, I am with you.”

It is no coincidence that in the opening verse of today's Gospel the Greek word that Matthew chooses for 'birth' is genesis. The birth of Jesus, in the same way that the entire creation came into being, is a new beginning, and this is what we will celebrate more fully in the coming days. As God breathed the Holy Spirit across the waters at creation, now God creatively breathes his own being into the world in the form of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine; God with us.

All of this helps flesh out the name "Emmanuel" that Matthew draws from Isaiah to apply to Jesus. "God with us." Or, perhaps even, "God REALLY with us." That is, God coming to be with us as we are. Not as we know we should be, or are trying to be, or have promised to be, or will be some day, but with us as we are now...today...in this moment.

Perhaps that's the promise at the heart of this passage - that as God came before to be with, use, accept, and hallow Joseph and Mary at the birth of Christ, so also God comes to us in Christ to be with us, use us for good, accept us as we are, and hallow us by God's own presence.

And so we wait. Through this Advent season we have waited in silence and contemplation. We have waited with joy and anticipation. We have waited in doubt and questioning. And now we wait with confidence, for the coming of God's presence to earth. Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel.

In the name of God. Amen.