

Immanuel: God with Us

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A. Introduction

- 1) Growing up in the Church, I had wonderful experiences with Christmas. Being in plays, the singing of Christmas songs, Silent Night sung to candles we had all just lit as a congregation.
- 2) I also learned the story of Jesus, the many prophecies foretelling his birth, about Joseph and Mary, the manger and the animals, the angels, the shepherds and Wise Men. All true, all rich and all worth reflecting on more than just at Christmas time.
- 3) In the early 1980s, as a young YWAM missionary, a speaker by the name of Gayle Erwin came through and impacted my thinking about Jesus. Today, blended with my own thoughts, I'd like to have some fun with you as we see Jesus in a light that Gayle taught me. My desire is that you'll leave today loving, enjoying and serving Jesus even more!

B. *So, what if you were God and you were sending your Son, how might you – or the marketing, social media world we live in – go about trying to reveal Him to the planet?*

1) His City of Birth

a. World's Way

- A big and famous city, allowing for instant exposure and media attention.
- When He's gone it's a significant enough place for a National Library.
- The big city of Rome (4-5 M), or even Jerusalem (75,000, swell for festivals)!

b. God's Way

- Bethlehem – 6 miles SW of Jerusalem (population: less than 1,000).
- Micah 5:2** – “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

c. The Message

- Surely no one can be impressed by His city of birth.
- As the King of Kings, He could have certainly commanded something bigger and brighter, but instead we see little and lowly.

2) His Birth Place

a. World's Way

- A tall building with lots of reflective glass, a nice glint from the sun to highlight!
- Best doctors, latest technology, spacious rooms. Lots of seating – many visitors!
- Jesus the only one to use it so it would be completely sanitary, no diseases!

b. God's Way

- After a long journey – only thing available was a stable; no room in the inn.

- If we would have been there a couple things would have stood out to us:
 - The smell! With the presence of animals, you get animal droppings everywhere!
 - Hay, likely the softest place for Mary to lay as she would give birth.
 - The feeding trough, or as we know it, the manger, was also filled with hay, marked with the fresh saliva of animals.
 - I can imagine if people from our culture in our day were present at that moment, we'd have nose and mouth masks on and be passing around the hand sanitizer!

c. The Message

- A birth place that could impress no one. A place where no one could possibly be threatened by it, but instead almost creates pity.

3) His Ancestry

a. World's Way

- Coming from rich, royal and pure bloodlines – with no skeletons in its closet!

b. God's Way

- Instead, the genealogies of Jesus listed in Matthew and Luke reveal how the beloved purity of the Jewish line had been compromised! For example:

- Ruth – a Moabite (worshiped a god that required human sacrifice)
- Rahab – a Canaanite and a Prostitute
- Abraham – a man who threw his wife, Sarah, under the bus when feeling insecure when going into Egypt!
- Jacob – name means supplants or undermines (his brother, Esau)
- Judah – who was a womanizer
- David – adulterer and murderer
- Solomon – who had hundreds of wives and concubines

c. The Message

- Plenty of skeletons in this closet, like many of us. Nothing too special.

4) Parents

a. World's Way

- Looking for “parents of the year” types! Maybe even holding a competitive TV show, entitled something like: “Parents for the Promised One” or “Messiah’s Mommy”? or “Who’s Your Daddy?” or “Game of Homes”!
- Once found, lots of training, sitting under experts, so they can address the unique physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and relational needs of the Son of God!

b. God's Way

- Chose a faithful and humble teenage girl, and a hardworking, trustworthy man!
- Yet, because of the way conception took place – by the Holy Spirit – Jesus grew up with the stigma of being an illegitimate child!
 - Having a child before being married could result in being excluded from the Temple of the Lord for 10 generations!

- Imagine the whispers at Nazareth Junior High when Jesus attended there...conceived by the Holy Spirit!!!
- “He doesn’t look like His dad at all...”
- Not exactly the kind of parentage you and I may plan for the Son of God!

c. The Message

- From His birth Jesus was vulnerable, open to taking cheap shots from peers, identifying with those who struggle in life.

5) His Name

a. World’s Way

- Smooth sounding, rolls of the tongue well, maybe good in lights!
- We could even give him a “stage name” like many of our actors:
 - Peter Gene Hernandez = Bruno Mars
 - Eileen Regina Edwards = Shania Twain
 - Steveland Judkins = Stevie Wonder
 - Carlos Ray = Chuck Norris
 - Joyce Frakenberg = Jayne Seymour
 - Issur Danielovitch Demsky = Kirk Douglas

b. God’s Way

- His Hebrew name is Joshua (Jehovah is Salvation or God Saves).
- Through the Greek we get the Name “Jesus.” Like in Spanish John is Juan or Mary is Maria.
- Imagine some of our favorite worship songs over the years:
 - “Praise the Name of Joshua...”
 - “Joshua Messiah, Name above all names...”
 - “Joshua, Joshua, Joshua, there’s just something about that Name...”
 - Or for our kids: “Joshua loves me this I know...”
- Joshua was a common name, not quite one appropriate for a King, especially the King of all Kings!
- He may have had three Joshua’s on his block where he grew up – or in his class.

c. The Message

- Common, everyday name – not standing apart from other people!

6) His Birth Announcement

a. World’s Way

- A gentle but ground moving earthquake, along with a heavenly trumpet blast that the whole world would hear, and a message inscribed on the moon!
- Now, you might be thinking...yeah, but Jesus had angels announce His birth...I didn’t have that!

b. God’s Way

- Imagine for a minute that you had been selected to be a part of heaven’s angelic choir that would announce the birth of the Son of God!

- Practiced for 100 years – wanting everything to be just perfect for the “Concert of the Ages”!
- Word gets out via heavenly text and “EternalGram” that today is the day the Son of God will be born. You get your robe on, find your place with the other tenor or soprano angels on the standing risers...you tune up...and are ready to belt out...when Gabriel pulls back the curtains...
- ...and there are 5 shepherds??? What??? Not exactly what you’d be expecting! Where are the rulers and influencers of the Earth???
- Shepherds were not in the center of the communication realm of their day. Not respected like they were back in King David’s day. Known to be a little light fingered with other people’s property.

c. The Message

- Hardly the kind of announcement for the most important birth in history!

7) His Appearance

a. World’s Way

- Certainly He would stand out in the way he looks (like some mentioned in the Bible) – tall, strong, long hair, trimmed beard, piercing eyes...
- Left to our marketers of today maybe something like this???

b. God’s Way

- Isaiah 53:2** – “...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.”
- He was very common looking, so much so that He could lose Himself in a crowd.
- Judas had to kiss Him to identify Him despite three years of his being in the public eye.

c. The Message

- His appearance didn’t make Him stand out, and threatened nobody.

8) His Hometown

a. World’s Way

- Where would you want the Son of God to be raised?
- On a Farm, in the City? How about the Suburbs?
- You’d have to consider other family around, the neighborhood, His friends while growing up, schools he would attend, etc.
- Back in the day, it would seem wise to raise Him in the city of Jerusalem, which means “The City of God” and “The City of the Great King”!

b. God’s Way

- Instead, it’s Nazareth. A nondescript dot on the map 12 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Population: 150-200. The whole town was literally one big family, of the lineage of King David. Located high on a hill and far from the main trade routes of the time.
- A conservative town, made up mostly of farmers, who clung to traditional

Jewish culture in a world that had been radically impacted by Greek thought and culture.

- Likely overshadowed by nearby Sepphoris, the luxurious Greek-style capital of Herod Antipas.
- John 1:45-46:** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”
- Why Nazareth and not Jerusalem?

c. The Message

- A small town with a poor reputation filled with the last, the least and the lost.

9) His Possessions

a. World’s Way

- In our Western world, ownership is central to our lives and families. Owning a home, our own set of wheels, a bank account are important values to us.
- Some use their possessions to put out a vibe of “see how important I am”.
- Certainly, as the “owner of a cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps 50:10), the one who turned water into wine, and who once paid his taxes out of the mouth of a fish – Jesus could be the financial Baron of all of history!

b. God’s Way

- Yet, the Scriptures tell us this about Him: “And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matt. 8:20)
- He didn’t own a home. We don’t even know that He had his own donkey for transportation (remember He had the disciples borrow one for what we refer to as Palm Sunday).
- Absolutely NOTHING about Jesus in our thinking identifies Him with possessions.

c. The Message

- Certainly, no upper hand or place of privilege due to His possessions.

10) His PR Man

a. World’s Way

- We live here in a city embedded with heavy marketing, hip social media, and the selling of people and products.
- Those looking for marketing want someone who is on top of it, who is smooth in all they do, so they client is not embarrassed, behind or forgotten.
- The choosing of that manager or marketer comes down to finding someone who is full of experience, knows everyone in town, is a great relator and communicator – and, at times, part magician!

b. God's Way

- Imagine if you were having a showcase to share your new songs. You'd invited every key executive in town to come, thinking this is your chance to maybe hit it big! *Then this guy walks in!*
- John the Baptist was a raving, tactless, offensive, completely non-PC man who didn't care what others thought!
- He was usually dressed in camel's hair, and if you caught him right after lunch you might see locust legs still sticking to the honey that dripped from his mouth unto his beard!

c. The Message

- Jesus easily identified with some strange folks!

11) His Associates

a. World's Way

- King of Kings – like a President – could choose the best and brightest!
- Great for His coming – and for after He would leave and return to Heaven. Young men who could help shape the world!
 - A few men who know the Old Testament well – know all the prophecies and could handle themselves in any debate at any time.
 - A few creative, strategic thinkers – to maximize His message.
 - A few public communicators with some charisma – articulate and could command the attention of the crowds.
 - Someone focusing on discipling the next generation with His ways.
 - A prayer warrior who covers it all in prayer.
 - An admin who keeps things running like clockwork: food, housing, communication, outreaches, etc.
 - Someone who funds the whole operation.
 - Our social media marketing guy.
 - And a security guy – just in case crowds got out of control, someone tried to get a little too close to Jesus, or if someone wasn't cooperating – like Zacchaeus not coming down the tree, or if He needed a little extra help sending a message while cleaning the Temple!

b. God's Way

- May have been the strangest crew ever put together with a mission to carry on what Jesus did to change the world!
 - Swearing, foot-in-mouth fisherman
 - A tax collector – a Jew hired by Rome to shake taxes loose from Jews
 - A Zealot – a Jew trying to undermine Rome's authority
 - Common, hard working, uneducated men
 - Accents that didn't add to eloquence
 - Jesus chose those who were “weary and heavy-laden”, those whom the world would not deem worthy – and He gave them His Kingdom!

c. The Message

- The crew Jesus hung with would have been deemed a motley crew by others!

12) **His Death**

a. **World's Way**

- In our movies our champions die heroic glorious deaths.
 - William Wallace in *Braveheart* is sentenced to be hung, drawn, quartered and finally beheaded – yet rises up to roar one more FREEDOM!
- The exit is important – worthy of honor and admiration.
- The death of Jesus was very different.

b. **God's Way**

- He died the death of a common criminal.
- Beaten and flogged with the Roman Flagrum, or cat-o-nine-tails, then hung on a cross where He was pierced in His hands, feet, and later, His side.
- The Creator killed by His Creation, a thief on either side of Him, mocking Him.
- Laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

c. **The Message**

- His death was not heroic in the eyes of those of the time; common criminal.

A DIVINE CONTRAST between how we may have positioned Jesus versus how God did it!

- + A city of birth that would not intimidate a soul.
- + A birth place that would impress no one.
- + An ancestry that reveals plenty of skeletons in the closet.
- + Parents off to a rough start with a pregnancy before marriage.
- + A name that was as common as everyone else around Him.
- + An announcement to a few shepherds in a field that seems hardly appropriate for the most important birth in history!
- + An appearance that threatened nobody.
- + A home town with a poor reputation.
- + No upper hand due to His possessions.
- + He had a really strange PR guy, and his associates were viewed by others as a bit of a motley crew.
- + And, His death was that of a common criminal.

Why???

C. Immanuel: God With Us

- 1) When we look at the birth, life, and death of Jesus we see Him consistently identifying with the common, the everyman/woman, the desperate, and the needy.
 - “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name **Immanuel**’ (*which means, God with us*).” - **Matthew 1:22-23**
- 2) Because of “God with Us”, look who gets elevated in our story:
 - A little town called Bethlehem - Rahab – a Gentile Prostitute
 - A young girl named Mary – Shepherds in a field
 - A small community with a poor reputation – Common men who would flip the world upside down

3) *God With Us Means:*

- **Proximity** – present with (*with you in time and space; always near*)
- **Participation** – a companion to enjoy and guide (*with you in doing life*)

4) When continue in the Gospel of Matthew we see this expression of “with” played out (*who*)

- **Matthew 5:1-6:** “Seeing the **crowds**, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied...”

- “When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, **a leper** came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

Matthew 8:1-3

- “When he had entered Capernaum, **a centurion** came forward to him, appealing to him, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.’ And he said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’ But the centurion replied, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed’...And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.’ And the servant was healed at that very moment.” **Matthew 8:5-8, 13**

- “And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw **his mother-in-law** lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were **oppressed by demons**, and he cast out the spirits with a word and **healed all who were sick**. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” **Matthew 8:14-17**

- “And behold, **a woman who had suffered** from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.’ Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And instantly the woman was made well.” **Matthew 9:20-22**

- “**A ruler** came in and knelt before him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.’ And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, ‘Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.” **Matthew 9:18, 23-25**

- “And as Jesus passed on from there, **two blind men** followed him, crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then he touched their eyes,

saying ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.” **Matthew 9:27-30**

- “And Jesus went throughout ***all the cities and villages***, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw ***the crowds***, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” **Matthew 9:35-38**
- “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Matthew 28:20**

5) **Philippians 2:6-11**

- “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by ***taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men***. And being found in human form, ***he humbled himself*** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

D. Closing

6) **Immanuel: God With Us – in both Proximity and Participation**

7) **Jesus**

- Available* to sinners and those in need
- Vulnerable* – mocked in Jr. High; ridiculed in ministry; with lepers, sick, diseased
- Approachable* – men/women – Jews/Gentiles – rich/poor – religious/sinners
- Humble* – no one and nothing beneath Him
- Serving* – laying His life down to better the lives of those around Him

8) **Life Application**

- Where do you need to pay greater attention to His proximity “with you”?
- Where do you need to engage more with His participation “with you”?
- Do you demonstrate “God With Us” in your daily life via:
Availability? Vulnerability? Approachability? Humility? Serving?
- Would the people around you say that they experience and touch “this Jesus” through the way you live your life and relate to them?
- What about the Christmas Season...Family? Friends? Neighbors? Strangers?

Discussion Questions

1. If you were God, what would *you* have wanted to do differently regarding Jesus’ birth?
2. Why did God choose to send Jesus into the world in such an unassuming way?
3. What does this contrast tell us about our continual need to become more Christ-like?
4. In the midst of our huge celebrations, how can we truly convey these truths to our children?