

"Emmanuel Answers the Prayer of His People"

Revelation 22:20-21

31 December Anno Domini 1999

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

For meal after meal, even as children become grandparents, the family has spoken the words during the table grace, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest." For generation after generation, even as civilizations rise and fall, the Christian has hymned his prayerful plea, "Savior of the Nations, Come." For century after century, even as a thousand years and more come to pass, the Church has assembled to sing her petition to the ever-present God, "Oh, Come! Oh, Come, Emmanuel!"

The sermon text for this memorable New Year's Eve is the last two verses in the Bible, Revelation 22:20-21. Please listen to that text as we consider the truth that ...

... Emmanuel Answers the Prayer of His People

He Who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

The anticipation of the Lord of Sabaoth fulfilling His promise to come to be with and deliver His people began shortly after the first Word of salvation was proclaimed in the Garden of Eden. Eve heard the Good News that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the devil and she understood that God would come and dwell among us, defeating Satan for us. Adam and Eve were sent out from Paradise and into this world where there is death and destruction, thorns and thistles, and while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and she declared her hope in the advent of the promise, "*I have gotten a man, the Lord*" (*Genesis 4:1*). But Cain was not the Savior and Eve's eyes did not behold the Incarnate Son of God in this fallen world.

Even so, the One Who was coming continued to be present with His people. The Lord God remained Abraham's ever-present Shield as the husband of Sarah *believed the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness* (*Gen. 15:6*). God was with Isaac as the young man beheld the sacrificial knife pass over him and plunge into the life-blood of the substitute. Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel as the incarnation-focused God granted Jacob the strength to endure the night until the blessing was given, as well as bestowing the blessing itself. The son of Amram and Jochebed heard the voice of God call to him from the burning bush, *Moses! Moses!* The man answered, *Here am I* (*Exo. 3:4*) and the Lord replied, "I AM here!"

The God of Israel heard the cries of His people in Egypt and came to them whom He had never left. The blood of the lamb stayed the Dreadful Presence of the Lord as the Breath of life withdrew from the firstborn of both man and beast. For their good, the Lord was posted for His people in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, and He stood, preventing the unleashing of the hard-hearted Pharaoh's fury as well as the assault of his army of men, horses and chariots.

This is the Lord God Who declared His advent while He continued to hold the children in His hands. He accompanied His people in the appearance of Cloud and Fire, of Rock and Manna. His Presence was with them in the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle and the Temple. The One Who has said, *Surely I AM coming soon*, continued to be with His people, though they were and though they are by nature sinful and unclean. Imagine that, dear children of God, that such people might call out, *Come, Lord!* Imagine that a person, one of whose sins of thought, word and deed would render him ceremonially and eternally unclean, would think of inviting, *Come, Lord!* Actually, you don't have to imagine anything at all ... for you are one of those people, aren't you? You pray, *Come, Lord Jesus!* Do you realize what you are asking for?

The Temple became the focal point for the Presence of God among His people, especially the Holy of Holies. St. Isaiah was there when the Lord came to His people and the prophet *saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And Isaiah said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" Then flew one of the seraphim to Isaiah, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched Isaiah's mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (Isaiah 6:1-7).*

So you do realize what you are asking for, don't you? You children of the Lord God desire the Dreadful, Holy, Just God of Mt. Sinai to come to you in all of His grace, mercy, benevolence and love. You want Him to send a messenger - a servant of the Word to come to you with the Word of forgiveness that touches your mouth, the Gospel of absolution that cleanses your soul, the Good News of grace that touches your life. That is what you want when you pray, *Come, Lord Jesus*, isn't it? You want the Word become flesh and tabernacling among us, don't you?

Then, in the course of history, the Ark of the Covenant is taken. The House of David is divided. Ten tribes are smeared in blood across the face of the earth and those few left from them into genetic oblivion. The children of Abraham are force-marched to Babylon. The Temple is destroyed. With downcast eyes, the faithful recall the psalmists' plea ...

Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on Thy servants (Psalm 90:13). Israel shall be glad. How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou forget me for ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Psa. 13:1-2). O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion! (Psa. 14:7).

After orchestrating the events of history using Cyrus, King of Persia, as His instrument, the children of Jehovah are enabled by God and man to return from exile. Thus, St. Malachi closes the sacred Hebrew prophetic writings with this promise from the great and ever-present, I AM: *Behold, I send*

My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His Temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of Hosts (Malachi 3:1).

The faithful have waited for this promise of *God with us* to be fulfilled. From Adam to Abraham, from Sarah to Hannah, from Joshua to Jeremiah, from Rahab to Ruth, from Moses to Daniel, the faithful people of God waited for the ever-present Lord to come as promised. *These all died in faith, not having received what was promised (Hebrews 11:13). And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets (Hebrews 11:32).*

Then, centuries later in Galilee, "How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n!" The Lord God is incarnate and makes the womb of a Jewish virgin His Temple. Indeed, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).* Then, days later in a carpenter's dream, *behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel," which means, God with us" (Matthew 1:20-23).*

Eight days after His nativity in the Bethlehem, the carpenter names this Child "Jesus" -- such a name he received when He shed the first of His Blood in perfectly fulfilling the Law on our behalf. A few weeks after that, He suddenly comes to His temple and is greeted by two people who had been waiting for the Advent of the Lord, devout Simeon who looked for the promise and old Anna. The inspired man took Emmanuel into his arms and blessed God, *"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a Light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Thy people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32).* The prophetess, Anna, who hung around the temple night and day beheld this holy Child Who had come to His temple and she thanked God and bore witness to the Redemption at hand (Luke 2:36-38).

Thus did Emmanuel touch the water at His Baptism, thereby sanctifying the water pouring forth from His side upon the face of the land. The earth's water and heaven's Word are now one of the Lord's means of grace, Holy Baptism. Thus did Emmanuel shed His royal Blood on Calvary's cross, and such Blood now continues pouring forth at His altar. At His Word, the grape's blood and heaven's wine is One. So did Emmanuel, the Manna from above, take bread and declare it His Body in the Holy Communion. At His Word the field's bread and the Lord's Body is One. On Easter evening, the Risen Redeemer came to His disciples and declared, *"Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:19-23).* Thus has "God with us" given us Holy Absolution.

Then just before Jesus, Emmanuel, ascended into heaven, He said, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have*

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20). God with us, though He was ascending into heaven, remained with us to the end of the age.

It sounds strange, but it is true. The Lord God Almighty is no less "I AM" now than in the days of the Patriarchs. St. Luke, the Gospel writer who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, informs his reader then and his readers today, *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1). "Dear Theophilus, the Gospel of Luke is only the beginning of what Jesus began to do and teach. He continues to the day that you are reading this."*

Then, in the unrecorded history of the church, some thousand years or so ago, a follower of Christ read two sections of Isaiah. First, *Behold a virgin will conceive and bear and Son and shall call His Name Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14)* and second, *He will come to Zion as Redeemer (Isaiah 59:20)*. Then did Zion, the Israel of God, the Church began to hymn a certain prayer petitioning the ever-present Jesus to come -- the always-with-you Christ to come,

"Oh, come, Oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, Shall come to thee, O Israel."

For nearly two thousand years, the Lord Jesus has continued beginning to do and teach in various and sundry places ... in houses of Asia Minor, in the churches of North Africa, in the caverns below Rome, in the fields of France, in cathedral and hut, in woods and aboard ship, in gulag and shelter, in places very much like this building here at Our Redeemer. "Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel." For nearly two thousand years, the Lord Jesus has been answering that prayer around altars of stone and wood, of slab and plank, on altars very much like the one here at Our Redeemer where the Real Presence of the Lord is believed, taught and confessed.

The Lord God Almighty extends His pierced hands and invites into His Presence ... to approach the Holy of Holies ... to join angels and archangels and all the company of heaven at the Table of the Lord. Does it not seem that He is inviting with His Table Grace, "Come, dear people, be My guest, and let My Gifts to you be blessed."

Thus it is only good and fitting that the last words from this pulpit at the end of this special year be the last words of the Bible. They contain the promise of Jesus, the ever-present Emmanuel. Please listen to the text once again under the theme,

... Emmanuel Answers the Prayer of His People

... He Who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.