

Why God Became Man Matthew 1:23

A Belgian soldier received a Gospel of John at the front during World War I. He read it with interest but could not accept the reality of Christ's personal concern for him, though he longed to believe. Alone on sentry duty one night, in the presence of danger, the soldier's thoughts turned toward God. If only he could believe Christ had come to earth and had died on the cross for him. But Christ seemed so far off. The eternal God would not be bothered about him.

A noise to the rear froze him in his tracks. He dared not move. But curiosity overcame fear. Turning his head ever so little, he was astounded to see standing behind him his monarch, the King of Belgium. The king was doing sentry duty along with the soldier. For two hours the king stood behind him motionless, sharing the soldier's every experience. In that interval the soldier thought about his king humbling himself to care for one of his subjects. Suddenly it dawned on him that the King of kings had left the royal ivory palace above, had taken his place standing on duty among us, finally to be mortally wounded for humanity's sin. Realizing that God in the person of Christ vitally demonstrated his concern for him brought the soldier to faith in Christ.

Of all Christ's titles the one that radiates the greatest warmth is Emmanuel, God with us. God not only dwelt on earth among us, but God became one of us! He who made the universe lived on this planet.

The One who put the stars in the sky and who holds all things together by the Word of his power came down to become one of us. The stupendousness of this central doctrine of the incarnation of Christ should drive us to ask the question: Why?

An educated Hindu idly stopped to examine a hill of ants. As he stooped, his shadow frightened them, so they scurried in all directions. When he drew back, the ants resumed their activities. He thought, “I wish I could talk to those tiny creatures to tell them I won’t hurt them.” He stooped again. A second time they scattered. When he drew back again, they resumed their work. His mind toyed with the experience. “Even if they had a language, I could not get through to them because my thoughts are not their thoughts. My terms of expression would not be comprehensible to them.” His imagination drifted on. “If somehow, I could become one of them, while retaining my personality but living in terms of their life, I could really communicate with them. Then they could understand something of my reflections.” Suddenly the thought flashed through his mind, “that’s exactly what these Christian teachers have been telling us all the time, that God became human in order to reveal himself to us and save us.” The Hindu embraced the Christian faith through the impact of his own analogy. Emmanuel, God with us.

God became one of us to reveal to us what God is like. When Jesus declared that the Father sees even a sparrow when it falls to the ground, we learn that God’s eye is on us who are much greater in value than any bird. Also, by his actions Jesus displayed what the Father is like. Is God compassionate?

Look at Jesus as he heals the sick. Is God tender? Watch Jesus as he touches the lepers to cleanse them, or gives instant sight to blinded eyes, or takes infants in his arms. Is God loving? See Jesus plead with Judas, forgive the dying thief, reassure Peter. When we gaze at Jesus, we know what God is like. Even as Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

How little our information is about God apart from the coming of Christ. Nature reveals the splendor and power of God, but not his love. A Fresco in Rome, called the Aurora, covers a lofty ceiling. To look up at it tires the body, causes dizziness and forces one to turn away with its beauties only half seen. Beneath the Fresco has been placed a mirror just above the floor level where one may sit and by looking down, study and appreciate the splendor of the superb work.

For centuries people gazed upward to learn what it could about God. The heavens displayed God's glory and handiwork. Now and again glimpses of God's majesty flashed forth through the midnight sky. But the revelation was too high to behold. However, in the fullness of time the far-off splendor of God was revealed by the coming of Jesus into our world. Jesus Christ is the brightness of the Father's glory, the very image of God. To see God, we don't have to look into the heavens. We only need to look into the face of Jesus Christ. Someone once wrote long ago:

The almightiness of God now moved in a human arm; the infinite love of God now beat in a human heart; the unbounded compassion of God to sinners glistened in a human eye; God was love before; but Christ was now love, covered over with flesh." Emmanuel, God with us.

Not only does Christ come to show us what God is like but also to enter into our experience so he could sympathize with and help us. Sooner or later, we all discover that we are weak human beings, dependent and in need of divine help.

But how can a far-off God properly sympathize with people on earth? Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, is the answer. In the flesh Jesus experienced every type of suffering. He knew what it was like to be hungry. He thirsted. He was so tired he sat weary by a well. He fell asleep in a violent storm on the sea. He was forsaken by all of his friends; he knew loneliness. Tears came down his cheeks at the grave of Lazarus. He suffered excruciating pain at his scourging and crucifixion, and then descended into the valley of the shadow of death. What type of suffering are you experiencing? Are you having problems at work, at home, at school, in a relationship, are you discouraged, do you need strength to go on; are you just plain worn out and tired? Whatever you are experiencing at this moment, Jesus, our Emmanuel is experiencing it with you.

Although Christ came to let us know what the Father is like, and to enter into our sorrows so he could sympathize with us and help us, the main purpose of the incarnation was to redeem us.

At the close of a worship service a stranger told the pastor, "I don't like your preaching. I don't care for the cross. I think it would be better to preach Jesus, the teacher and example."

“Would you be willing to follow him if I would preach Jesus as an example? Asked the pastor. When the stranger assured the pastor that his wish was to follow Christ’s steps, the pastor suggested, “Then let us take the first step. It says of Jesus that he did not sin. Can you take this step?” The stranger looked confused. “No, he admitted, I do sin. I acknowledge it.” “Well then,” replied the pastor, “your first need of Christ is not as an example, but as a Savior.”

To follow Christ’s example is impossible until we first are rescued. The angel said to Joseph, “You shall call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.” Yes, as Martin Luther put it, ‘Christ came to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.’ Jesus, our Emmanuel truly is our Savior.

How much we need this Christmas experience!! Let’s keep telling the story of Christmas again and again. When I get discouraged and feeling low, I like to read this text from Matthew, but I change one word in it. “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel which means God with me. God with Dave Beese. Jesus came to this world of mine to show me what God is really like. God came to me to help me with any and all problems I might be facing. God came to me to save me from my sin and deliver me from death. Jesus is my Emmanuel. Is he yours too?

Amen!