

**Sermon    December 21, 2025    Matthew 1:18-25**

### **Immanuel: God With Us in the Impossible**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ... “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ... And he called his name Jesus.

Just a few months ago, in August 2025, a nurse from Bakersfield, California, named Suze Lopez was preparing for surgery to remove a massive 22-pound ovarian cyst that had plagued her for years. A routine pregnancy test came back positive—after 17 years of hoping for another child. Days later, severe pain rushed her to Cedars-Sinai, where scans revealed something doctors called “almost unheard of”: a full-term baby boy growing not in her uterus, but in her abdomen—an abdominal ectopic pregnancy, hidden behind that enormous tumor. This condition is almost always fatal for both mother and child. Yet, in what physicians described as a “medical miracle,” a team of thirty specialists delivered a healthy 8-pound boy named Ryu while removing the cyst. Mother and baby are thriving. Suze said, “God gave me this baby so that he could be an example to the world that God exists—that miracles, modern-day miracles, do happen.”

We marvel at such stories because life appeared where human biology says it cannot—against impossible odds. And that, beloved, is the heartbeat of Christmas: the virgin birth, where life enters the world in a way that defies all natural expectation.

But Matthew doesn't linger on the biology. He rushes to the meaning: "They shall call his name Immanuel—God with us."

Immanuel is not just a sweet holiday sentiment. It is the thunderclap of the Gospel.

C.S. Lewis, that master of making the profound feel fresh and familiar, loved to use stories to unveil eternal truths. Let me expand on one of his favorite ways of explaining the incarnation—something he touched on in *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and his letters.

Suppose you are a great novelist, the author of an entire world. You have written a story filled with free characters—men and women who can love, create, laugh, and choose. But tragically, those characters have used their freedom to rebel against you, the author. They have turned your good world into a place of selfishness, cruelty, and death. The story is ruined. Now, as author, you have options. You could scrap the whole book and start over—destroy the characters and write new ones. Or you could appear in the story as a minor figure—a wise sage or a distant king—shouting instructions from afar, hoping they listen. You could even send messengers with letters: "Stop this rebellion! Return to the plot I intended!"

But none of those would truly heal the story from the inside. The rebellion has gone too deep; the characters are too entangled in their own twisted choices. The only way to save the story, to redeem the characters while respecting their freedom, is for you, the author, to enter the tale yourself. Not as a character invented from within the story, but as yourself—becoming one of them. You lay aside the privileges of authorship, take on the limitations of paper and ink, and step onto the page. You are born as a baby in their world, grow up under their laws, feel their pain, speak their language, and ultimately die their death—all to defeat evil from within and rewrite the ending with your own blood.

That, Lewis would say, is what God has done in Jesus Christ. We are the rebellious characters. The world is the ruined story. And the virgin birth is the moment the Author steps onto the page without ceasing to be the Author. He does not merely send another prophet or impose a new law. He becomes one of us—fully human—while remaining fully God. The virgin birth safeguards this mystery: no human father means no inheritance of the rebellion's guilt. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, this Child is sinless from the start, yet truly shares our flesh. He is Immanuel—not God watching us from heaven's balcony, but God walking our dusty roads, weeping at our graves, hungry in our wilderness, nailed to our cross.

Lewis put it memorably: "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." Or again: "He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity... down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him." This is why Immanuel echoes through the entire Gospel:

In the storms, when waves threaten to sink the boat, Jesus is in the boat with the disciples—God with us in chaos. On the cross, when He cries out in forsakenness, He tastes our deepest separation—God with us in abandonment. In the empty tomb, He rises with a body we can touch—God with us in victory over death.

In His final promise: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

And today, Immanuel is still with us—really, truly, bodily—in His preached Word, in Baptism where He clothes us with Himself, in the Supper where He feeds us with His own body and blood.

Where do you need Immanuel this Christmas? In loneliness? In grief? In a diagnosis that feels impossible? In guilt that won't let go? The virgin

birth declares: God is not distant. He has entered the story. He is with you.

Joseph trusted the angel's word amid scandal and fear. He took Mary home and named the Child Jesus—Immanuel. May we, like Joseph, trust the promise: God is with us—not because we are worthy, but because He is gracious.

Little Ryu's birth reminds us that God still breaks into the impossible. But the greatest miracle is not a hidden baby surviving against odds. It is the Author Himself becoming a baby to survive for us—to die and rise, that we might live forever in His redeemed story.

Hear the angel's words anew: "Do not fear." Immanuel has come. And He will come again. Amen.

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