

4 ADVENT DECEMBER 19, 2010 CYCLE "A"

TITLE: JESUS IS EMMANUEL. COME LET US ADORE HIM!

READINGS: Isaiah 7:10-16, Ps. 80: 1-7,17-19, Rom.1:1-7, Matthew 1:18-25.

Did you hear about the Kansas Highway Patrol trooper who turned on his car's flashing lights to stop a woman motorist who was speeding? The woman didn't notice the flashing signal, but her young daughter did. She exclaimed, "Look, Mommy. A Christmas tree is following us." Decorations and lights are pretty and nice to see this time of the year, but they are symbols. We need to seek the true meaning of Christmas, what so many of these beautiful symbols stand for.

It is very interesting to compare the journey we are asked to take through Lent to Easter and the one we take through Advent. Lent descends from Ash Wednesday through the penitential season to the abyss of Passion Week and Good Friday – and then Easter suddenly bursts upon us and from the utter sadness of the cross, all at once we begin singing and shouting Alleluia, he is risen! Advent, on the other hand, rises in a steady crescendo toward the full light of Christmas. The crescendo of Advent is reflected in our liturgical readings, which beginning with the prophecies of Isaiah and John the Baptist, find their culmination today, this fourth Sunday of Advent, when our readings focus on the announcement by the angel and the virgin birth of Jesus.

From Isaiah's promise to king Ahaz in our first reading today, to Matthew's application of that prophecy in the coming of the Messiah, we are encouraged to grow in our anticipation of Jesus, our Emmanuel. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign," says Isaiah, "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Isa.7:14. It is interesting that Isaiah does not use the word for virgin in his prophecy. But Matthew does specify virgin when he is applying this prophecy to Mary the virgin mother of Jesus. Matthew then takes us to the fulfillment of that prophecy as the angel of the Lord assures the righteous man who would be the Messiah's earthly father, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matt.1:20b-21. For this child, just as Isaiah prophesied, is Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

Wow! God is with us! Doesn't that just want to make you say, thank you God? You are with us, thank you! You are with us in Jesus Christ! Haven't I received Jesus? Yes, I've received him in faith, I have received him in baptism, I receive him through prayer, and I receive Jesus in a very special sacramental gift of his body and blood each time I receive Holy Communion. Then just how do I reflect that presence in me, in my life? Perhaps I could make a few changes here and there to manifest Emmanuel's presence in my heart. It may take time, it may take effort and a change or two, but I believe I can reflect his presence in me much better!

Author Max Lucado tells a remarkable story of the son of a rabbi who battled severe emotional problems. One day the boy went into his backyard, removed all his clothing, assumed a crouched position, and began to gobble like a turkey. He did this, not just for hours or days, but for weeks. No pleading would dissuade him. No psychotherapist could help him.

A friend of the rabbi, having watched the boy and shared the father's grief, offered to help. He, too, went into the backyard and removed his clothes. He crouched beside the boy and began gobbling, turkey-like. For days, nothing changed. Finally the friend spoke to the son. "Do you think it would be all right for turkeys to wear shirts?" After some thought and many gobbles, the son agreed. So they put on their shirts. Days later the friend asked the boy if it would be acceptable for turkeys to wear trousers. The boy nodded. In time, the friend redressed the boy. And, in time, the boy returned to normal.

What an amazing story. What amazing love! Do you understand that this is what Christmas is all about? It's more than the birth of a special baby, it is more than an angels' song. It is God invading our world, stripping himself of all his power and dignity that he might die naked on a cross in our behalf.

Matthew helps us on this fourth Sunday of Advent to realize that we are close, close to the time of coming, close to the realization of one of the most magnificent truths in the Bible, close to the fulfillment of the Lord's promise, to the reason we celebrate Christmas: God actually becomes man in Jesus Christ, his Son. In just five days we celebrate Emmanuel, God with us, God with us forever. When we truly accept Jesus Christ into our hearts, our lives, nothing, not even death, can separate us from him and his love. God is with us to stay. Ask him today to stay, to make you Christian through and through, to live and love in your heart.

Matthew reaches back to Isaiah to remind us of what the great prophet said, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look the virgin is with child and shall bear a son and name him Emmanuel.” Isa.7:14. Yes, it is Christmas. God is with us, come let us adore him. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney