2018 Christmas message at Cal Poly Pomona

 **Immanuel” (which means “God with us”)**

Matthew 1:18-25

Key Verse 1:23

““The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).”

Merry Christmas! The title for today’s message is Immanuel which means God with us. May we read this verse together? Let’s go. ““The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).”

Let’s pray.

Christmas is one of the most joyful time of the year. And the reason is the birth of Jesus Christ. Today we would like to think about why the birth of Jesus Christ is so joyful for all of us based on Immanuel, God with us. There is an interesting and funny story. One mother had two sons, 8 years old and 10 years old. And they are so mischievous and trouble makers that she could not control them at all no matter whatever she did. One day she heard a new clergyman on her town is an expert to take care of those trouble makers, young sons and daughters. So she went to him and he agreed to meet two boys one by one. He met first the eight years old boy. The clergyman with frown face and stern voice, asked him, “Where is God?” No answer. After a while he asked him again with a more stern face and a little bit higher voice. “Where is God?” No answer. The third time, the clergyman said to the boy, asked the boy with the most stern face and with the loudest voice, this time even with his finger pointing to his face, “Where is God?” At this, the boy ran out of the room and went to his ten years old brother. His older brother asked him, “What happened?” The boy said to his brother, “We have a big trouble this time!” “God is missing and they think we did it!” No wonder the clergyman was an expert to take care of troubled boys. “Where is God?” “Where is God?” According to the title, where is God? God is with us! My message is based on two parts. Part I. God with Joseph (vs.18-21) Part II. God with us (vs.22-25)

**Part I. God with Joseph (vs.18-21)**

Let’s read verses 18-21 responsively. I will go first. “**18**This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19**Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. **20**But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

We all know the story. And Joseph in today’s passage was a righteous man. Verse 19 says, “Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law”. He was a faithful man to God’s law. He was righteous man in the sight of God. But this righteous man was not exempt from troubles in life. Arguably the betrayal of Mary was the most traumatic, the greatest agony in his entire life. When he heard his fiancé Mary was pregnant the only way for her to be pregnant was to have someone else. First, Joseph might have denied it. “This cannot be true!” Then after for a while, he might be burned with anger. “How could she do that!” After for a while he could despair. Maybe he wanted to give it up. He was righteous man, faithful to the law of God. So he had to divorce her. But he was also graceful. He did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace. So he wanted to divorce her quietly. Righteous man Joseph was not exempt from agonies of life! After he had considered this, after he had spent many sleepless, agonized nights, finally when he decided to divorce her quietly, the Lord sent an angel to him, in a dream, and said, ““Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

The Lord was with Joseph at this agonized moment of his life. Although he was righteous, he was not exempt from terrible troubles in life. But the Lord was with Joseph at this trouble times! And the son will save his people from their sins. Sin, according to the bible, is the source of all troubles in our lives. We know what is troubles, agonies, and difficulties of life. You are all familiar with it. I am familiar with it. Sin is the root cause of all our agonies in life. And Jesus will save his people from their sins. The greatest good news of all people on earth.

The Lord was with Joseph when Jesus was in agony even though he was a righteous man. There is another example in Genesis. The righteous man suffered and the Lord was with him. That was Joseph in Genesis. Joseph in Genesis was the eleventh son of his father Jacob. He had 10 older brothers, step brothers. Joseph was a righteous man, innocent man. He was faithful to his father. And his father loved him. And his brothers envied him. So where there was a chance, they wanted to kill him. Eventually they sold him as a slave to Egypt. Joseph was sold to a man named Potiphar in Egypt. Suddenly when he was a teenager boy, he became from a loved son of his father to a slave in a foreign land. Although he was an innocent boy he was not exempt from troubles in his life. When he was sold as a slave, what happened to him? If you look at Genesis chapter 39, this is how it says, “The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered.” It does not say, “Joseph was with the Lord” or “Joseph was faithful to the Lord” so that he prospered. It says, “The Lord was faithful, the Lord was with Joseph” so that he prospered.

More than Joseph wanted to be with the Lord, the Lord really wanted to be with Joseph. What will happen if Joseph wanted to be with the Lord? If Joseph wanted to be with the Lord, he will bound to fail. There will be times he may not be with the Lord. But when the Lord wants to be with Joseph, there will be no failure! There is no failure in the Lord! The Lord was with Joseph without fail. And that was the secret of his prosperity.

He was a righteous man. He worked so hard. But he was not exempt from troubles in life. As he was a handsome man and well built man, his wife, the wife of his master, Mrs Potiphar took notice of it. And he wanted to have sex with him. “Let’s go to bed with me!” That was one single message whenever she had a chance. Joseph, the righteous man avoided it. But one day when there was no one in the house, she grabbed him and demanded him to go the room and sleep with her. And Joseph ran out of the house, throwing away his cloak, his clothes. Her lust turned into a fierce anger and she lied to her husband and Joseph was thrown into a prison. Slave in a foreign land is already lowly position. But now he became a criminal. Slave, criminal in a foreign land, the bottom of bottom of society.

What happened to him? If you look at Genesis chapter 39, the Lord was with Joseph, and he was kind and helped him to find favor in the eyes of the prison warden. Whenever I studied the bible passage of this part, I always ask questions. “Why didn’t the bible say “As Joseph was with the Lord” or “Joseph was faithful to the Lord” he was prosperous. Joseph was faithful to the Lord, or “as he was with the Lord” the Lord gave him kindness and favor to find in the prison warden.

It is because it is the Lord who initiated to be with Joseph. Joseph was a faithful man. How can he be faithful? His faithfulness will be limited. But if the Lord wants to be faithful with Joseph he will never fail. If the Lord wants to be with Joseph, who can be against him? He will never fail and the Lord will be with Joseph forever, always! And that was the secret of his success. Although he was righteous man he was not free from troubles and agonies of life. But the Lord was with Joseph in the time of his agony.

**Part II. God with us (vs.22-25)**

Let’s read these verses responsively. “**22**All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23**“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).
**24**When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25**But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

The virgin will conceive and will birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel which means “God with us” was given to evil man. This prophecy was given to an evil man. And his name is king “Ahaz” in the kingdom of Judah.

King Ahaz was evil man. He even sacrificed his children to worship idols. Such a wicked man! As much as righteous men were not exempt from troubles in life, so also wicked people are not exempt from agonies of life. He heard the news! Two northern kingdom tried to invade his kingdom and took care of him and his country would be destroyed. He and his people were so fearful. Bible describes that they were shattering. They are trembled like trees in the forest by the wind. Evil men are not exempt in the troubles of life.

But at the same time the Lord was with evil man king Ahaz. He sent the prophet Isaiah, and told him to stand firm in the faith. Of course evil man Ahaz would not want to do that. Since he was an evil and had weak faith, the Lord even offered him a sign from heaven. Ask sign, visible sign, whatever it is can convince you I will give it to you and help you to believe! And you will be fine. King Ahaz rejected it. No, I am not gonna ask the sign. “No!” I am not gonna put the Lord to the test. But the sign was given to him anyhow.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they call him Immanuel which means “God with us”.

This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ. There is possibility that this was fulfilled in the time of king Ahaz. But it was ultimately fulfilled in the time, at the birth of Jesus Christ. So Jesus Christ, the name of Jesus Christ is, “God with us, Immanuel”

Now when Joseph woke up he did what he was commanded. He was righteous and faithful man. Now we learned that God is with wicked people and righteous people. What about “us”? What do you think you are? Do you think you are righteous? Or wicked or combo.

We know the Lord was with righteous man, Joseph and wicked man Ahab. How about us? The bible says “God with us”. The word “Immanuel” is the combination of two words. “Immanu” which means “with us”. “El” means “God”. So “with us God”. Immanuel, with us God.

If God wants to be with us, who can be against him? If God wants to be with us how can he fail? If God wants to be with us he will be always with us. If we want to be with God we are bound to fail. in a matter of time we will fail to be with him. But if the Lord wants to be with us he will never fail. The last verse of the book of Matthew is this. “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” This is the Lord’s decision and promise. “I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS” to the very end of the age. If the Lord wants to be with us always to the very end of the age, what will happen? The Lord will be with us always. Period. The Lord will be with us always! Whatever we think, whatever we feel, troubles, he will be always with us. Now it is confirmed the Lord is with us always. Since he cannot fail, this is the truth. Even whatever you acknowledge or not.

Now when we know the Lord is with us, what should we do? After we know the Lord is with us, what should we do? If I tell you, “Oh, someone is with you”, your response probably will be, “Oh, who is he or who is she?” If someone is with us and if we ignore him or her, it is insult. It is rude. Since the Lord is with us always, we need to SEEK him. We need to seek him. According to the Bible, self-seeking is sin, and God seeking is what God desires.

I studied Genesis in 1975, the first book in the bible. Genesis has seven lessons at that time. And my bible teacher asked me to make a vow when we studied Jacob’s vow. So I made a vow. But when I wanted to make a vow, it dawned on me “Should I make a vow on the condition that God does exist?” Or “Should I make a vow on the condition that God does not exist?” Because I did not know. I considered it and reasoned it. I made a vow on the condition that God does exist. Praise God! I reasoned it for selfish purpose because it is safer. You know vow is obligation on my side. I don’t want suddenly popped up huge obligation on my life. So I thought it would be safer to make a vow on the condition that God does exist. My vow is something like, “If you help me to overcome all the darkness in my heart and in my practical life; if you help me to do this so well that my life would be perfect so perfect that even if I am born again I want to live exactly the same life. Do this for me and you will be my God and I will live for you. Because I know I would not lose anything.

Such a perfect life is what I vowed to God. I was born again. 10 years have passed. 20 years have passed. 30 years approaching. Nothing happened. So I wondered because I believed God never fails to answer vow. That was my faith. So one day I asked to the Lord, “Lord, I look at my life, and there is not many years left. You did not answer my vow so far. I don’t have many years left. When will you answer my vow?” This is what the Lord told me, spoke to me. “Why are you SEEKING your obedience when Jesus’ obedience is yours?”

Wow! I am still thinking about it. “Why are you seeking your obedience when Jesus’ obedience is yours?” There is a parenthesis in the middle. “Why are you seeking your obedience (which will always fail)” as a matter of time. You’ve been doing this 3 decades. “Why are you seeking your obedience which will always fail?” Is 30 years of proof not enough for you? Why are you seeking YOUR obedience? Whereas Jesus’ perfect obedience is yours all the time. Has been yours, is your, and will be yours all the time! Why won’t you seek it?

Oh, I realized, Oh, I got a wrong direction. I should not SEEK my obedience but JESUS’ OBEDIENCE. When God is with us, Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, we should not seek us but God who is with us always. When you are in trouble, instead of thinking about how trouble, but think Jesus Immanuel who is with you go through the same trouble.

When you suffer from fear, instead of thinking about you “Oh, I am so fearful”, “I am in deep depression” but seek Jesus Immanuel who is God with you and he is going through the same fear and depression.

What is the most tragic and fearful event in all men’s life? Do you know what it is? What do you afraid of the most? Death! “I am going to kill you. Do this!” that is the ultimatum to every human being. Jesus, Immanuel, who is God with us, he became a man because he wanted to go through death for us. We don’t know what will happen after death. But through his own death, he made our death what? Peaceful sleep. He became a man. He is with us. He is God with us went through death so that we may not go through death. But we may enjoy death as our peaceful sleep!

Why don’t seek Immanuel, God with us but seek us? I believe a couple of reasons. First, we are seeking miraculous big signs to be convinced God is with us. Evil man Ahaz didn’t care about a small sign for him. A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel? It was too small for him. The sign for him probably. There is thousands and millions of solders from other foreign countries coming to help him. Maybe that was sign to him “Oh, God is with me!”

Bible says Jesus Immanuel God with us. All Christians know this. But why do we fail to seek him? Because we may seek miraculous signs. Let me ask you a question. I know God is with you. What kind of sign do you have to prove God with you? What kind of sign do you have? If someone comes to you, “I know you are a Christian. I know God with you. Can you show me a sign that God is with you?” What kind of sign can you give? What kind of sign do you have? Do you have thunderous signs that your bodies vibrates, filled with such a power or full of energy full of laughter. Do you have that sign? Yes? No? Don’t know! You don’t. I don’t. But what do you have? What do you have?

You have what the bible says. “I am be with you always to the very end of the age.” Bible says Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. That’s the sign. That’s what you have.

Another reason we may not seek God but seek ourselves is because we want interpret presence of God when God solves our problems. When the Lord solves our big troubles, surely say, “The Lord is with me!” No problem! Praise God! But let me ask you. Don’t you have troubles? Is anyone who is completely free troubles? Raise your hands. Is anyone completely free agonies of life? Raise your hands please. I want to meet that person. Jesus will save us from our sins ultimately in the kingdom of God. But in life, we have agonies and troubles of life. If you look for a sign of the Lord’s presence in the matter of solving our troubles we are in trouble. When I will seek the Lord.

What do we need to seek then? Instead of resolving our problems, what do you need to seek? God with us! That’s what we need to seek. God with us! God did not promise to exempt us from troubles of life. Jesus even said, “In this world, you will have trouble”. Trouble guaranteed. Maybe you came to hear listen only joyous message. But I say to you ‘you have guaranteed troubles’. But that’s not it though. There is another GOOD ONE. What is it? GOD WITH US! Immanuel! Troubles may come and go. If you take care of one trouble, what happens? Another coming in! If you take care of that one, another will come sooner or later. But what is one thing that is always permanent and not changing? What is it? GOD WITH US! He promised! “I will be with you always to the very end of the age.” When he wants us to be with us always who can be against us? We cannot be even against this. Even if we do not want to be with us still he will be with us. Are you depressed? Strange question on a Christmas day, right? We have troubles. But we have good news. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Whether you are righteous or wicked or combo we all have troubles. But God with the wicked, the righteous and us ALWAYS! This is the good news!

One word: Immanuel which means God with us.