

Longing for God's Presence

We sing "O Come, O come, Emmanuel" in early December as we wait to celebrate Jesus' birth. But now, what about now?

Are we still waiting eagerly for Him? Are we still welcoming Jesus' presence?

I have been pondering on the name of Jesus given in Matthew. It's more of a title than a name, really. He was actually CALLED "Jesus".

Emmanuel – God with us, is a name and a promise all in one.

OPEN:

- Do you know the meaning of your name?

READ:

- Matthew 1: 18-23 (NRSV) The Birth of Jesus the Messiah
18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us."

The Name Emmanuel is only used a couple of times in the Bible. In Hebrew, in the Old Testament, it's spelled Immanuel. In Greek, in the New Testament, it's spelled Emmanuel.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 7: 14, showing that the birth of Jesus fulfills a prophecy made centuries earlier.

Then, this special name or title for Jesus is not used again. But at the end of the gospel, (Matthew 28: 19,29) Jesus says:

19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. **And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

I read about a family that played a game with the nativity set. The mom hid the figure of Baby Jesus, and the children searched for it. She would call "Near" or "Far" to help with the search. At the end of the game, she reminded them that "the good news is that we never have to search for God like we did in our game. God is with us."

What is amazing about this name-that-is-also-a-promise is that Jesus Emmanuel CHOOSES to be with us. He WANTS to be with us, close to us. There are times when I'm cranky. I don't even want to be with myself. I wonder how Jesus Emmanuel could possibly want to be with me at times like those, but I'm so grateful that He does!

REFLECT: What appeals to you most about having Jesus always with you?

SONGBOOK: "I must have the Saviour with me" #647

1 I must have the Saviour with me,

For I dare not walk alone;

I must feel his presence near me,

And his arm around me thrown.

Refrain:

Then my soul shall fear no ill; Let him lead me where he will,
I will go without a murmur, And his footsteps follow still.

2 I must have the Saviour with me,
For my faith at best is weak;
He can whisper words of comfort
That no other voice can speak.

3 I must have the Saviour with me
In the onward march of life;
Through the tempest and the sunshine,
Through the battle and the strife.

(I used the Serendipity Bible and the book "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" – An Advent Study for some ideas.)