

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
December 13 & 14, 2014
John Crosby
Come and See: Emmanuel, God With Us
Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:3**

The gift, or one of the gifts we have at Christmas, is that the Christmas narrative is told through the eyes of different people. You may nod because you've heard the story told so often and you realize that at least four different people are telling it, but it has a lot to offer being told from different perspectives. Last week Laura and I talked, well, Laura primarily talked, which is always a good thing, and she told the story of the virgin birth through the eyes of Mary. That is how Luke frames his Gospel to talk about the birth of Jesus.

Another point of view comes from the Gospel of Matthew, which tells the same story, but through the eyes of a man. What was it like for Joseph? While it's the same story, the only real point of commonality in the words is that the angel comes and speaks to both and at one point says the same thing to both, "Don't be afraid." So before we jump into it, I want to talk about what it's like to be afraid at Christmas because back then, it was a very fearful time. The Israelites were trapped between superpowers. They were semi-slaves. They had limited religious freedom. They were afraid.

Today, in the midst of the richest country in the history of the planet, we are interlocked in a world at war, where the gap between the rich and the poor grows, and protests of every kind make us at least uneasy and many times afraid. These weeks before Christmas, Advent, are a time when, as the song says, the hopes and fears of all the years meet. Fear is among us and fear has a cousin. Fear's cousin is named anger. Anger and fear go right together. Fearful people are very often angry people. That anger often blasts into sight, whether it's on the planes of Syria with rockets, or in a gridlocked Congress where people yell at each other all night, or in Ferguson, or in protests of all kinds. Fear and anger go together, but that often gets glossed over. It often seems to hide at Christmastime, but it doesn't go away.

Last weekend here during the services, three different people, two men and a woman, came up to me and asked if I would pray for them this week because each of them had to fire somebody before the first of the year. One person had to let a whole department go before the first of the year. She asked, "How do I do that?" Thursday, a friend of mine for years, was here at church because he got laid off—just like that, unexpectedly—and fear raises its head. So the story you hear in the Gospel is not a fairytale. It's about fear like that little girl experienced when she had to go and have her mom find out that she was pregnant. Fear is rooted in our lives and while this is a story about a birth, it's important for me, every time I preach, to remember that over 30 percent of us, maybe between 30 and 40 percent, who sit here are single. Single again, single by choice, some not by choice. We should remember that when we are talking about what looks like the perfect little family. Christmas is hard.

The story about surprise pregnancies is especially close to those of you out there who would pray for that kind of a surprise. One of my friends this week said, "You know, I feel like every time my daughter looks at her husband, somebody's pregnant" but that is so often not the case and where everybody else seems like they can get pregnant, for you and your desire, it gets harder. We would like to be sensitive to that and so we are gathering together a small group of people, maybe not so small, who are struggling with getting pregnant and would like it to not eat into their relationships or their joy of life, but find it's a battle. If you are one of those folks or if you love one of those folks who is struggling with infertility, I'd ask you to call the church this week or talk to one of the pastors and we'll tell you where and when this very private group is going to meet to support each other and offer each other resources in this Christmas season. I think that's enough said. Let's pray.

Lord, the apostle Paul once prayed that You would open the eyes of our hearts so that we would see the world around us, not just with our heads or our fears, but with Your heart. I pray that the eyes of our hearts would be open to the hopes and fears and the losses in our lives so that this story about a baby is more than a Hallmark card we give each other. Bless us because You love us. Amen.

Matthew says in chapter 1,

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." 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").

As I listened to the story of Matthew this month, what struck me in a fresh way was the names being bandied about, Joseph son of David. Names are important. It's important to call each other by names. I say that with a smile on my face because the joke around the church is that John Crosby cannot remember his own name, much less your name. I'm sorry but I struggle, not if I call you Bubba but when I call you Sweet Pea. I want to know your name, but I just struggle with names.

I know that names are important, so I thought I'd stop just for a second in this story about names, because the names we give our children mark them through their whole lives. John Francis Xavier Crosby, IV. Really? What were they thinking? As a matter of fact, when we look at our culture with names, you're like, "You're going to call him *what?*" Celebrities are especially weird. Girls have names like Ocean and Apple. Would you like to be a five-year-old girl in kindergarten and have to be the first one to say, "My name is Beetle"? Really? But as bad as it is for the girls, it seems like the guys take it to another level. One of my own heroes, Frank Zappa, named his first two kids Dweezil and Moon. Remember that? Then he thought he'd change pace and named the last two Diva and Ahmet. Really? John Cougar Mellencamp said, "That's awful!" His son said, "But, Dad, you called me Speck Wildhorse!" The winner or the loser though in the "I've

got to stand up and say my name” may be Nicolas Cage’s son, Kal-El Cage. If you are a Superman comics fan, you know that Kal-El was the childhood name of Superman. Really? The rest of your life people look at you and they think about who you are because of your name.

To be fair, that happens in the Bible, too. We’re going to look at the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah names the first of his sons, *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*. Doesn’t sound so bad, but it means *run for the treasure*. It means *show me the money*. The worst is the prophet Hosea. As a sign of God’s frustration with Israel, Hosea ends up marrying a prostitute. The first child that they have together is called *Lo-Ruhamah*. *Lo* means *no* or *not* in Hebrew. It literally means *I am not loved*. And then they had a second child, *Lo-Ammi* meaning *not my people*. All their lives, *I Am Not Loved* and *Not My People* are walking demonstrations of that because of their names. Can somebody else, please, name these kids? Names are important.

So now maybe you read in our story here about the names Jesus has. Jesus has three names. It starts in verse 18 when it says, “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.” Now growing up around the church, not *in* the church, but growing up around the church, I always thought that His first name was Jesus and His last name was Christ. It makes sense, right? Jesus Christ. It was said with some different emphases out in the garage when somebody’s thumb got hurt, first name and last name, but Christ is not Jesus’ last name. Christ is Jesus’ title. It’s really Jesus the Christ. *Christos* is the Greek word. *Christos* means anointed one. Jesus the Anointed One, *Christos*, or Jesus the Savior, Jesus the Messiah. This is His title. Jesus the Anointed, the Savior, the Lord, the Ruler. It’s His title. It’s His first name.

There are two other names in this passage. The angel turns to Joseph and says, “You’re to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.” Or as Hispanics would have heard, *hay-SUS*. That doesn’t sound as familiar but the Jews would have heard, “You’re to give Him the name Yeshua,” “You are to give Him the name Joshua,” and they would have heard, *ye-SHOO-a*.

Joshua is a famous Biblical name, right? Joshua is involved in the most famous salvation of all the Jews everywhere. Moses leads the slaves out of Egypt into the desert and for 40 years, they avoid starvation and see miracles and the Promised Land is there, but just as they get to the Promised Land, Moses dies. Who leads them out of the wilderness into the Promised Land? It’s Joshua. “You are to save My people.” The difference here is that Joshua is the one who brings Israel into the Promised Land after Moses dies. Jesus is now supposed to do what the Exodus and the Law of Moses pointed toward but could not produce. This is supposed to be not only a Promised Land, it’s supposed to be a promised people. Jesus is supposed to rescue people, not just from slavery to Rome, but from slavery to sin. The Jews, who have been slaves in Egypt and exiles in Babylon, are now living as vassals in Jerusalem, their own home town. They are still slaves on the inside, in their own hearts. Call Him the Christ because He is the Anointed One. Call Him Jesus because He saves people.

Jesus’ last name is found only three times in the whole Bible. The third time, the last time it’s used, is right here in Matthew 1.

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”).

In other words, this is prophecy. Matthew points out that this is something that God promised a long time ago using the name Immanuel. The second time Immanuel is used in the Bible is in the Book of Isaiah, the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 8.

⁸ God is with us! His outspread wings protect the land.

The prophet says, “Immanuel, God is with us! His outspread wings protect the land.” So Immanuel is a protector of some kind. But the angel says, “Call Him Immanuel because of Isaiah, chapter 7.” Isaiah, chapter 7 is a conversation between the good prophet and the bad King Ahaz of Judah. Israel has already started to fragment into parts: Israel to the north and faithful Judah to the south. Ahaz is the bad king of Judah, all that is left of Israel. He is not only a bad king, he is a bad man. He will sacrifice anything. He will sacrifice his own kids to the gods. He is not the kind of guy you would vote for if you believed in voting for anybody. He’s a bad king. The Assyrians are coming and threatening to take over the whole of Egypt. Syria and Israel want to form an alliance with Judah and say, “All three of us little countries can fight against Assyria. They won’t come if we band together.”

Thousands of years later, there’s still a war on the plains of Syria, isn’t there? And it engulfs the whole region but back then, Ahaz, the bad, is also Ahaz, the dumb. King Ahaz dithers so Syria and Israel form an alliance and actually attack Judah so there can be one kingdom that will fight against the Assyrians, against the superpower. King Ahaz is so scared by now that his court sends in Isaiah, the hated prophet, to calm the king down. Ahaz hates Isaiah because Isaiah never has a kind word to say. He is always saying God this, God that, and God the other thing, and Ahaz has no time for that. But, they send Isaiah in and he brings a very simple, unexpected message. He turns to King Ahaz and unexpectedly says, “It’s going to be okay.” He says, “Ahaz, if you trust in God, it will be all right.” Isaiah says, “God will give you a sign that everything will be okay.”

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [Isaiah 7:14].

“Immanuel, God with us, and before the kid is old enough to grow a beard, Judah will triumph. Trust Him.” Not trust Isaiah, trust God. “If King Ahaz would only trust God once, there will be peace in the nation. The land will overflow with milk and honey.” To make a long story short, Ahaz misses his chance. He keeps on scheming. He does not trust in God. Things do not go well for King Ahaz. Things do not go well for Judah. They are conquered and Ahaz basically ends up captured as a vassal of the Assyrian emperor. To show that he’s loyal, Ahaz sacrifices his own son by throwing him into the fire of the Assyrian gods. If Ahaz would only have learned to trust God, Immanuel, God with us, God would have painted a different picture, but it’s hard to trust and wait when mostly you trust in yourself.

We have grown up as a country incredibly successful, unbelievably wealthy, because we have worked hard. We have figured it out. We have fought to the top. We trust others but we trust ourselves more. It was countercultural for Isaiah to come in and say, “Stop and don’t do anything. Trust and God will act.” It was countercultural back then and it’s countercultural now. For Isaiah back then, this Immanuel, this child, would be the hope for all of Israel, for the whole nation, for anybody who trusts.

For Matthew, telling the story of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, is the hope for the whole world, for all who trust God. "It's in Christ alone," he says, "that God shows up." Let me say that again. It is in Christ alone that God shows up and that is where our only hope resides. At the very beginning of Matthew's story, an angel comes and says, "Don't be afraid. God will be with you. Immanuel will be with you." Remember how the story of Matthew ends? In Matthew, chapter 28, Jesus sends His disciples out into the world and what does Jesus promise?

20 I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus said, "I will be with you to the close of the age. I will be with you to the end of the world. I came to stay." Yeshua means that some of us need to be saved again. The price means that the Anointed One has come to rule. Immanuel means God will always be with you, not intervening from a distance, but right up close. Not what you expect! Why would God come in the form of a baby instead of some super terminator robot? Not what you expect but *here*. Don't you want that at Christmas? The story is saying, it's great news; be very careful about what you wish for. Be very careful about what you ask for under the tree because if you say, "I so much want God to come close," oh, my God, what if that God comes close? What happens if God actually shows up for you?

Remember how the story starts way, way back when it says, "In the evening God walked with His people." Now, God is promising to come and walk with His people and that could be wonderful and it could be extremely uncomfortable. "I really want God to walk with us, but did you see what I was just looking at on my computer? Let's talk about that later." "I really want God to be as close as my breath, but did you hear what I just said about that coworker?" "I really want God to be with me, but did you see what I was thinking about my career?" We want God to walk with us in the garden except for those times when we want to take a little detour and take care of business.

Dallas Willard once said, "God will let everyone into heaven who can stand it." In the end, God will let everyone into heaven who can possibly stand to be with God 24/7, not because God is a goody two-shoes but because God is God. Os Guinness is a philosopher and he once said that at Christmas, it's never been easier to convince people that Jesus comes for them. It's never been easier to believe in a Savior. People want a Savior. People want good news. But it's never been harder to convince people that they are not only in need of a Savior, but that they are rebels and need a King. They need a Lord who says, "Not that way; come *this way*." It's never been easier to celebrate the baby Savior. It's never been harder to follow the King who says, "Not only will I never leave you, but I will never leave you alone."

What's in a name? Jesus wants that God wants to lead you to a place of salvation. Not safety, salvation. The Christ is He that is the anointed, appointed one. He is the one we have been waiting for, whether we are ready or not. Immanuel says that God will never leave us and that's great hope, but Immanuel says that God will never leave us alone either. What name to you most need to hear? When you look at the manger this year, what name do you most need to hear? Christmas is God with us all the time—or find another name.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You come in disturbing ways. I thank You that You do not take *no* for an answer, that You do not wait until it's convenient. I thank You that You are the God who brings hope out of sorrow and life out of death and love out of pain and

justice out of chaos. And so with all of the risks that are involved, we are not asking for a baby to come this Christmas. We are asking Yeshua to come and be our Savior and Christ to be our King and Immanuel to be our God with us. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.