



DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

Week of December 18, 2022 (Matthew 1:18-27)

Prayer for Groups & Personal Devotion:

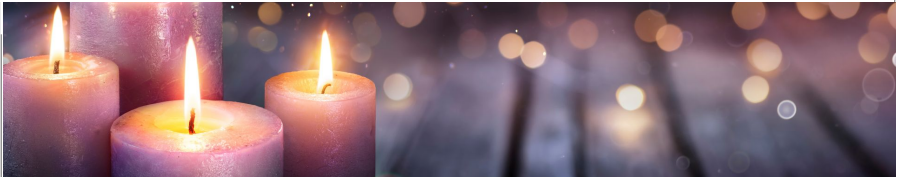
Emmanuel,
you approach...
and today we approach you.

You will bring hope...
hope which we seek today.

You will bring light...
as we live in dark times today.

You will bring peace...
as conflict surrounds us today.

Emmanuel,
God with us today, God with
us tomorrow, hear us,
heal us,
help us.
Amen.



Devotions for Life, Advent IV

The Story: Matthew 1:18-27

Context: So it's Advent IV. The final Sunday before Christmas Eve. We'll forgo the context of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole for now and get to it when we dig into the book more deeply in a week or so. For now, what's important to understand is that each Gospel deals with the birth of Christ in radically different ways: Luke is, of course, the one with the most extensive narrative and because of this it's the one we read every Christmas Eve. John's birth narrative is hardly a birth narrative but is more of an incarnation narrative as it is where we get "The Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Mark has no birth narrative, as it begins with Jesus as an adult being baptized. However some like to think of Jesus' baptism being his birth narrative as it is where God names him, saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved...".

In Matthew we get just a little bit of narrative, and it's nothing like Luke's as it centers more around Joseph than it does Mary. Two of the most significant pieces to this narrative are that, one, it's where we actually get the part of Jesus being named "Jesus" and that it's done by Joseph. And, two, it's where we get the reference to Isaiah about a child being born and being called "Emmanuel", meaning "God with Us".

With that in mind, it's important to understand how Hebrew Prophecy works. They work on multiple levels:

Advent at Home IV :

[Light the candles you lit last week]

The candles of hope, peace, and joy are lit. May they burn deep in our hearts, minds, and souls.

[light the next candle]

God so loves the world, that God shows up with us, in the flesh! In a world filled with hatred, love is the answer. May we all know that we are loved, and may we spread love wherever we go.

Let us Pray: Come, Lord Jesus, the lover of our souls. The world needs your love. Help us to spread it to all. And as we near Christmas Day, help us to slow down in our excitement and hear your voice. Amen.



There is usually a near prophecy, where the prophet is speaking into the current moment and something is happening or will happen soon that impacts that moment. Then there is a “far” prophecy, which is to say that the prophecy can be fulfilled in infinite ways in the future. So when Isaiah is prophesying about a “child to be born” who will be called “Emmanuel”, while Jesus can be a fulfillment of it, Isaiah likely didn’t have a child in Bethlehem hundreds of years later in mind when he spoke that prophecy. It’s more likely that he was thinking of a child to be born during the time of King Ahaz as proof that the military alliance of Syria and Israel (the northern kingdom) against Judah (the southern kingdom) would fail. It is perfectly ok to read Isaiah and apply it to Jesus, but to say “Isaiah is talking about Jesus here” denies Isaiah its context and contributes to Christian Supersessionism (the notion that Jesus and the New Testament supersede the Hebrew Bible and Judaism), which is a gateway to antisemitism. As Christians we have a responsibility to dismantle antisemitism whenever, wherever, and however we can- even if it alters some of our traditional understandings of some of our core stories.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What do you think Joseph not wanting to “expose her to public disgrace” is about?
2. Why is Joseph planning to “dismiss her quietly” a sign of his righteousness?
3. Take a moment and really reflect on the notion of “God with us”. Do you believe this? How does it impact your life? How does it connect with the John 3:16?
4. What does Christmas mean to you? What traditions are important to you and/or your family?

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