Sermon Series: The Hymns of Christmas
O Come O Come Emmanuel

Text: Matthew 1:18-23 -- Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

Introduction: Who is Jesus? Few questions could be more relevant at Christmas. **Yet a new Lifeway Research study shows THAT MORE THAN HALF OF ALL Americans believe in a Christological heresy**. Or to put it another way, only 41 percent of Americans believe the "**Son of God existed before Jesus was born in Bethlehem**." That means **59 percent either do not believe or are unsure** whether they believe that the Son of God existed prior to the Nativity. As pastors prepare their Christmas sermons this year, we might be wise to keep this fact in mind. Many who will walk into church on Sunday morning—some Christians, some not—**hold to a heretical understanding of the Trinity**. **They'll listen to the sermons and sing the songs, but their view of God is not biblical. To be blunt, their view of God is not Christian**. (So), rather than a narrow focus on what Christ did, we need to expand our vision to who Christ is. John's Gospel is exemplary: "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made**" (**John 1:1–3**). The Apostle is eager to introduce the saving work of Christ, but before he does so, he lifts us outside **the confines of history** to contemplate who this Son is from eternity: ***the Word who was not only with God but also was God***. But unless our Savior this Christmas is the "**great God**" himself, the One who descends into our darkness out of the glory of His everlasting light, we will never enjoy the blessedness and bliss of that (radiant) vision.

Over the next four weeks and on Christmas Eve night, we will be looking at what Scripture has to say about the first coming of Christ, appropriately named the Advent season. I have entitled this brief series, ***The Hymns of Christmas***. As the title implies, we will focus on some of the messages in five of the most popular Christmas hymns ever written. For my message this morning, I have chosen the hymn ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***. **It is probably the oldest Christmas carol still sung today**. The writer is unknown. It was likely a monk or priest who penned the words sometime before **800 A. D**. We know that he was a scholar with a rich knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. Once it was completed, the hymn was picked up by many European churches and sung as an important part of the liturgy during the celebration of Christ's birth. ***It was popular because many people in the dark ages could not read and had no access to a Bible.*** **So, the hymn *became for them one of the few examples of how the Old and New Testament views of the Messiah came together in the birth and life of Jesus***. **Originally written in Latin, it owes its ultimate worldwide acceptance to a man named JOHN MASON NEALE**. He translated the work into English sometime in the 19th century and combined it with the tune of a song called "**Veni Emmanuel.**" From that point on it became one of the most popular Christmas hymns of all time.

The first verse of the song (**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear**) is taken from **Isaiah 7:14 written more than 600 years before Jesus' birth -- Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.** We find the same text in **Matthew 1:23** applied to our Lord Jesus Christ. IF the writer of ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel*** found a strong connection between the Old and New Testaments when it came to Jesus, ***it was with good reason***! Now I invite you to open your Bibles and join me as we look at this

verse from the Gospel of Matthew and those surrounding it that detail the coming of the Christ-child who is called Immanuel – God with Us.

The Uniqueness of the Child (**Matthew 1:18-23 -- Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**). **THESE VERSES ANSWER THE QUESTION, HOW DID HE GET HERE?** I'm sure you're familiar with the story. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. This was a legally binding arrangement that could only be broken by a certificate of divorce. As a matter of fact, if either the man or woman was unfaithful during this time it was considered an act of adultery (**See Deuteronomy 22:23-24**). The marriage itself took place when the groom as part of a ceremony took the bride home, just as Christ will do with the church when He comes again (**Revelation 19:7 -- Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready**). **Matthew informs us that before Joseph and Mary came together** (*a phrase that implies a sexual union that was only expected when the man and his wife were married and thus living together*) **she was found to be pregnant**. Note that Matthew adds the phrase "**by the Holy Spirit**" here because he does not want to mislead his readers to form a bad opinion of Mary. Joseph, still in the dark, however, was a righteous man, and could not in good conscience proceed with his marriage to Mary who was considered to be unfaithful. **To continue would have been nothing less than an admission of his own guilt that he was the father**! Neither did he wish to expose the woman he loved to public disgrace. Instead, he chose a quieter way by preparing to divorce her privately. That's when the angel of God spoke to Joseph in a dream and said, "**Joseph son of David** (a reminder of his ties to David from whom the Messiah would come—**See Matthew 1:6, 16**)**, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit…**" So that we're clear on this, the virgin birth does not mean that God had sexual relations with Mary. Luke provides a little more insight into this arrangement in **Matthew 1:35**. The word "**overshadow**" is also used in **Matthew 17:5** describing an experience that Peter, James and John had during the transfiguration of Christ when a bright cloud enveloped them. It would be bizarre to think that Matthew was implying somehow God had perverse sex with them. **Rather he was implying that they were experiencing in a unique way the presence of God**. So, it is here in **Matthew 1** that we're simply told the child within Mary had been placed there by the Holy Spirit as He overshadowed her.

Jesus is unique in the way He came to us! Not before or since has another human being been conceived in such a way. It's interesting to note that **the Muslim calendar** is dated from an event called the **Hegira**, when Mohammed fled to Medina to escape persecution. **Our calendar is also dated from a journey, but it was not a journey to flee persecution or anything for that matter**. It is based on Christ's journey from Heaven to Earth, a unique event in all of human history that marks Him as someone very different from the rest of us.

The Significance of the Child (**Matthew 1:21 -- She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins**). Remember that we said **the uniqueness of the Christ-child** answers the question, **HOW DID HE GET HERE**? This verse answers another question of equal importance -- **WHY DID HE COME?** Joseph was told by the angel that he was to name his son Jesus. This was not a suggestion but a command. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "**Joshua**," meaning "**Yahweh is salvation**." Though there are several men named Joshua in the Old Testament, two are very prominent, **Joshua, son of Nun**, the successor to Moses and **Joshua the High Priest**. Yet the angel makes it clear that he is not referring to either when he quotes **Psalm 130:8**. There was much expectation on the part of the Jews for a Messiah that would redeem Israel from Roman rule, but there was no expectation that the Messiah would give his own life as a ransom to save His people from their sins. And yet that is exactly what this One named Jesus was going to do.

Saint Athanasius once said, "***He became what we are that He might make us what He is***." "And what is that?" you ask. The answer is – **A child of God, alive and holy.**

The One who came to our world in a most ASTOUNDING manner, came for a most OUTSTANDING purpose…to save us from the penalty and power of sin (**See Isaiah 1:4, 15-16**). **Here's the first verse of O Come, O Come Emmanuel again: O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel (God's people) that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel**. Pretty biblical, isn't it? He came to save us from the penalty of sin (death). **Listen to this story**: On **March 5, 1994, Deputy Sheriff Lloyd Prescott** was teaching a class for police officers in the **Salt Lake City Library.** As he stepped into the hallway, he just happened to notice a gunman herding 18 hostages into the next room. Dressed in street clothes, Prescott joined the group as the 19th hostage, following them into the room and shutting the door behind him. When the gunman announced the order in which hostages would be executed, Prescott identified himself as a police officer. In the scuffle that followed, Sheriff Prescott, fatally shot the armed man. All of the hostages were released unharmed. **This is similar to what Christ has done for us. He dressed in street clothes (human flesh) and entered our world, to rescue those held captive by the devil. Then at the right time, He defeated the Devil and rescued us from sure death and eternal separation from God -- 2 Timothy 2:26 -- … and they (humanity) may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will -- NASB). (Review: THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CHILD; THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHILD)**

The Identity of the Child (**Matthew 1:22-23 -- All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).** Just like the previous passages I read to you; these verses also answer a question -- **WHAT IS THE NAME OF THIS ONE WHO HAS COME FROM GOD TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS?**) Names tell us a lot about the people who possess them. Take **Jacob** for example. His name means "**he deceives**," something he was famous for. You may remember that one day God changed it to "**Israel** (literally "**he struggles with God**)," certainly an accurate title for the Jews as well. The name **Sarah** means "**princess**." As a mother of many nations, she was related to royalty. Matthew tells us that this child is none other than **Immanuel—God with us**! **In the Bible, there is no greater blessing for the people of God than to dwell in the presence of God.** King David saw it this way. That's why he said this in **Psalm 27:4 -- One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple)**. The fact that Jesus is "**God with us**" is vital to our understanding of one of the essential truths of our faith. **As a human, He could satisfy the agreement that God made with the first man, Adam…obey and I'll bless you, disobey and you'll die**. As God, **He was able to establish His own righteousness** (**Hebrews 7:25-26 – He (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens**) **and so offer Himself in payment for the sins of others**. He was the fulfillment of the promise made centuries before through the prophet Isaiah. Did you know that **O Come, O Come Emmanuel** actually alludes to at least four Old Testament prophecies (**Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 11:1-5; Malachi 4:2**)? We have looked at only one of them. In fact, there are over 300 prophecies that Christ fulfilled in HIs first coming. **Dr. Charles Ryrie** says that according to the laws of chance, it would require two hundred billion earths, populated with four billion people each, to come up with one person whose life could fulfill even one hundred accurate prophecies without any errors in sequence. I guess God wants to remove all the guesswork as to whether or not Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who has come to redeem His people and save us from our sins.

Conclusion: THIS MORNING, WE'VE LOOKED AT THE UNIQUENCESS OF THE CHRIST-CHILD (HOW DID HE GET HERE?), THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHRIST-CHILD (WHY DID HE COME?), AND THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRIST-CHILD (WHAT IS HIS NAME?). When you consider the Bible's answer to all three questions, you're left with

only one choice. Will you place your faith and trust in Him to be your Savior? SOONER OR LATER EVERYONE HAS TO DECIDE THE HOW THEY'RE GOING TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION.

Each morning **Alexander Chu** awakened to the smell of incense burning offered in front of Buddha statues. His home was like a temple. On each wall hung a Buddha portrait, totaling more than 30 deities throughout the house. You might think the family lived on a street in Thailand or China yet his home was in **Lawrence, Kansas**. His father was a science professor with a Guggenheim Award, and his mother was a so-called "tiger mom" who kept the pressure on Andrew and his two sisters for straight A's. My Taiwanese family lineage includes generations of Buddhists, so religion was destined to be integral to my identity formation. Yet outside our home, our neighbors pursued an entirely different faith. **Somehow, I managed to go through 18 years of life without ever hearing the Good News of Jesus**. In the mid-1990s, Andrew arrived at the **University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign**. His dorm was full of fervent Christians. These **InterVarsity Christian Fellowship students** were the first **Asian American Christians** he had ever met. Andrew said, "**Living with them, I began to realize that the Buddhism of my upbringing was not in my heart**." Growing curious about Christianity during his sophomore year, Andrew asked a friend if he could join him at an IVCF gathering. There for the first time, he heard God's promises declared in worship songs and saw men and women praising him. He joined **GIG** (**Groups Investigating God**) and began studying the Gospel of John. Andrew said, "**The authority with which Jesus spoke amazed me; it's as if his words jumped off the pages, addressing me directly." Before I could place faith in Jesus, I needed to know there was a rational basis for Christianity's foundational truths. I attended a retreat sponsored by InterVarsity, where I took an apologetics track. I heard well-founded explanations of the inspiration of Scripture, the problem of evil, and the uniqueness of the gospel. I found that Christianity was the most intellectually stimulating worldview I had ever encountered. During my junior year, I started reading John Stott's pamphlet "Becoming a Christian." While reading, I grew convinced of my sin and need to be forgiven. I knelt down and committed my life to Christ. I had grown up in a sea of deities, yet never had a relationship with any of them. On that day, I experienced the living God, Emmanuel: "God is with us." A peace overtook me. That night I became the first Christian in our family's lineage**." (*Alexander Chu, "Beyond Buddha to Beloved," CT magazine (June, 2014), pp. 79-80*).