

# Immanuel – God with us!



It is time to celebrate Christmas. This time to celebrate comes along every year in December. Of course, there are Christians (a minority) who don't wish to celebrate the so-called "Christmas" because they opine that the celebration is associated with a pagan festival in history. So what? It is not surprising if another group of people also dissociate themselves from any celebration of Christmas because they opine that it is associated with Santa Claus.

For those people who do not celebrate Christmas for the reasons they hold, I think it is better that they do not celebrate than to celebrate without knowing the right reason or for commercialism sake. Still, it should be fine for most Christians to celebrate with the proper idea of what the joy of Christmas is all about – the birth of Jesus:

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and **they will call him Immanuel**" (which means "**God with us**"). – Matt. 1:22-23*

## Contemplating heaven and hell

As people of religions deal with questions on heaven and hell, **Immanuel** enables Christians to directly reckon the face of God in their envisioning of eternal hope. The expression "**Immanuel**" conveys the intimate relationship between God and man, a very comforting assurance of **God with us** from beginning to end:

*Jesus – His name is "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins. (Matt. 1:21)  
Hence, He is Christ, the Messiah  
Immanuel – "Whom shall I fear, for you are always near, I will praise You all my days ..." (Lyrics from a Christian hymn)*



## “The Sign of Immanuel” – Isaiah 7 (NIV)

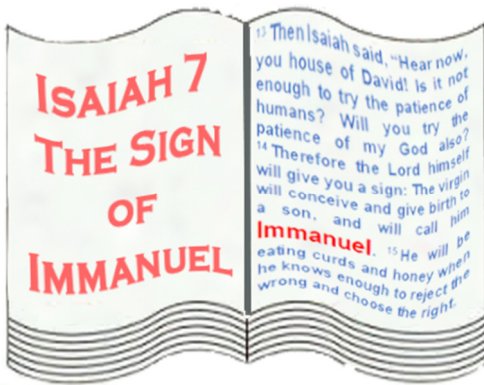
The kingdoms of Syria and Samaria had already begun their offensive against the kingdom of Judah as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. King Ahaz of Judah was weak and unwise. He intended to approach Assyria for help, but Assyria was a stronger rival of Judah. So, the unwise king Ahaz was in fact inviting a disaster by asking one strong enemy to help deal with two other enemies.

*“Yet, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen ... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” – Isa. 7:7-9*

Isaiah advised the king to have faith in his own people (not outsiders) to fight off the enemies with the help of God whereby the attack by the enemies would not succeed, but he was exasperated by the king’s intransigence:

*Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?” – Isa. 7:13*

The sign of **Immanuel** thus appeared (for the first time) in Isa. 7:14:



*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: **The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.** He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.*

*The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.” – Isa. 7:14-17*



- *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” – Mt. 4:17b*
- *“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees ... What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?” – Isa. 10:1-3*

**Immanuel** – a resounding exclamation of God’s constant presence with His people!

**Immanuel – God with us – always with us** – as our intercessor:

- 1) in the present time through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26) and
- 2) for our future divine deliverance with Christ as the one mediator between God and us. (1 Tim 2:5)

“If God is with us, who can be against us?” – Rom. 8:31

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life ... neither the present nor the future ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Rom. 8:38

### The hope of Immanuel

As a matter of history, the nation of Israel had been subject to a lot of internal and external oppressions. She was in a restless state, being in a mess both domestically and abroad. The hope for the revival of a nation and the salvation of a people became pressing in minds and souls. The Messianic prophecy gave Israel hope, and thereby the spiritual ballast. **Immanuel – God with us** – was the persistent hope that Israel had that God would not forsake them. The hope, built upon faith in God, gave them the strength to persevere through all the challenging situations with eyes looking towards future glory.

### Immanuel – As we celebrate Christmas

As we celebrate Christmas, we know that the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy. Unfortunately, there are still many people who fail to recognize this fact despite loads of historical documents attesting to the veracity of the

events leading to and out of The First Noel being in congruence with prophecies.

This most pleasing news of Jesus' birth for God's people to grasp warranted a great company of the heavenly host to appear with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." (Luke 2:13-14)

The hope of **Immanuel** becomes our anticipation of salvation that our Saviour brings – salvation to those on whom God's favour rests!

### Who are those on whom God's favour rests?

#### **Not everyone!**

The Book of Romans Chapter 9 speaks of Paul's anguish over Israel. No doubt the people of Israel were a special nation, being the recipient of a multitude of special blessings which were stated by Paul as follows:

*"Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." – Rom. 9:4-5*

Unfortunately, the tasting of the blessings had also led to complacency and a denial of the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy in the birth of Jesus. There was a misplaced notion among many of "automatic entitlement" to salvation in consideration of their ancestry. Paul, through his epistle, attempted to disabuse the people of the false notion, with his lecture on the truth about God's election in the salvation of those whom He chose.

The topic on God's Election is a complex one, not for me to discuss here. I am still ruminating on the confluence between the idea of God's election and the idea of our free will to make a choice to get into God's favour. Pray that God grants me wisdom to understand.

However, in simple terms, suffice it for me to say that salvation is not by demand. We have no locus standi to claim a right to salvation against God's decision by His sovereign will. Besides, salvation is not by inheritance. To borrow Paul's words, "it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children." (Rom. 9:8) In other words, when a child's parents are of the faith, it does not automatically mean the child by descent belongs to the Kingdom.

## Immanuel – God with us – but are we with Him?

Do you welcome the birth of Jesus like many do, or do you reject him as the Messiah as many others do?

It does not matter whether you celebrate Christmas or don't. Those who celebrate vs. those who don't celebrate – one is not necessarily more blessed than the other in terms of getting God's favour.

However, it is significant whether you remember that Christ was born on the day He was born to fulfil God's promise.

**Immanuel – God with us** – regardless of whether we are Jew or Gentile.

Christ was born to be our Saviour:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” – John 3:16-18*

## Final Question

Do you believe?

John Lee 

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### Romans 14:5-6a

*One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.*