

Immanuel In Our Wandering

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Thanks so much, Alexandria. How's everybody doing today? Sounds like a lot of joys in the room. We should have a lot of fun. And yeah, so short on announcements, but it's because my sermon's really long. Just kidding. It's actually shorter than normal. So you can all breathe a sigh of relief. Those of you who don't know me, I'm one of the pastors here. My name is Jesse. If you're listening to this online, glad you can do that. If you got a Bible, go ahead and turn to Matthew 2. We're continuing on in our Advent series.

And we're specifically looking this particular year, we're looking at Jesus as Emmanuel and all that it means. And Emmanuel is this word, which means God is with us. And last week, Elliot, another one of the pastors, he taught on how God with us means that he loves us up close, which I love that phrase. It's one of those phrases that just kind of like stuck in my heart and I carried with me. It's not one that's easy to forget. God with us, that is, it means that he is there. He loves us up close and personal. And he's able to do that because he knows what it's like to be us. And today we're going to explore that a little bit further. And we're going to look at how Jesus came and lived our experience, both with us and for us. And so just a warning, when I say turn to Matthew 2, we're like reading the whole chapter. All right. And so that's about 23 verses. The good news is it's like story form. It's a narrative. So it's really interesting. I won't lose you. All right. So we're going to jump right into it. Matthew chapter two, starting in verse one, it says this. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod, the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people. He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet and you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem saying, go and search diligently for the child. And when you found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Now, when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remain there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill the, what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt. I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.

She refused to be comforted because they are no more. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. For those who sought the child's life are dead. And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled that he would be called a Nazarene. This is God's word. So if you're familiar with the Christmas story at all, like that front part is familiar to us. It gives us the warm and fuzzies, wise men traveling to Jesus. They bring him gifts of gold and frankincense and more and myrrh.

But then like right after that, everything gets real janky in the story. I mean, it goes crazy. Like Herod turns into like the equivalent of a upset mob boss who feels like he's been slighted. And so he wants to take Jesus out. He puts a hit out on Jesus. And so he goes nuts.

[5 : 07] So there's that. And thankfully God goes and he warns the wise men, hey, don't go tell Herod where Jesus is at. And then he also tells Joseph, hey, things are about to get really gnarly. Head down to Egypt and flee from this guy to keep Jesus safe, right? Now that's all good. But as I was preparing this sermon, I got to thinking, man, if I was Joseph and I realized, you know, this going down to Egypt and fleeing, it's like, this really doesn't make sense. Like this is God's son. God, you're the God who created everything. You're the almighty. Like if you wanted to, you could kind of do like the Kung Fu Panda Skadoosh and then like Herod's done. Like no more problem there. Like if you want to, like why, why doesn't he do that? Well, it, it seems like God forces them to do something unnecessary with all this fleeing down to Egypt. But for Jesus to be God with us, for him to truly be Emmanuel, he had to live our experiences, even the hardest ones. And so Jesus fleeing to Egypt means that Jesus knows what it's like to live in exile. And that's important for us to know, especially as

Jesus followers, because that is one of the monikers given to us. Like we are called sojourners. We are called exiles. The whole letter of first Peter, it is addressed to the exiles scattered throughout the world. And so the good news for us is that, Hey, despite the fact that's who we are, we are sojourners and we're exiles. We never really lived that out alone because we have a savior who lived that too.

And he was a foreigner in a foreign land. He knows what it's like to feel like the outsider, not quite fitting in. And he subjected himself to that. He chose to be that. And that also means that God, the father chose that path for him. He didn't, he didn't take the easy route. Now we can step back and say like, man, okay, man, God, if I was, if I was Jesus's dad, I would have probably chose something nicer. I'm, I'm, I'm second guessing your parenting style here, but there's a lot going on here. Why God chose this way for him? Because a part of his plan was to protect his only begotten son, but it wasn't through a great display of power. It was by running away in that moment. See, he was embracing weakness.

Jesus was embracing weakness. Now what's interesting here is that this isn't the first time God sends his people down to Egypt and uses Egypt as a safe place. Abraham, when he was wandering around, God called him out of his home and his country. And he said, I'm going to take you to a land that your, your descendants would one day inherit, but you're going to walk around that land and live in it by faith, like a pilgrim. But at some point there was a severe famine there. And so he had to go down to Egypt to sustain and survive. But then God called him up out of that. Same thing happened with Israel, Abraham's grandson and all his son and all his family. They had to go down to Egypt in order to survive a severe famine. Seems like God has this interesting thing about sending his precious people down into Egypt, but then also bringing them back out and seeing God's redemptive plan. Egypt serves two purposes. It's both a place of God's provision and it's a place to be delivered out of. Okay. But here's the point of all this. We're meant to take this away. Egypt isn't home. Another way to say this is don't fall in love with this world so much that you forget that you don't belong to it. And so God did it with Abraham and with the whole, and then the whole nation of Israel. And then he did it again with

Jesus. He sends him down, but he brings him back out of Egypt. Abraham, he came back to wonder as a pilgrim once again in Canaan. Israel came out of Egypt to wonder as pilgrims in the wilderness.

[9 : 08] Jesus came out of hiding in Egypt into a kind of wondering as well. Now, remember we read this in verse 19 that talked about how Herod's son, Archelaus, had replaced him. Herod died, his son replaced him.

And so Joseph's bringing Jesus back. God says, take him back, bring him back. But when he hears that, like, oh no, Herod's son's reigning over Judea. I can't, we can't really go back home. That isn't a safe place. And so not only that, he's feeling that God warns him in a dream. And so what does he do?

He withdraws to the district of Galilee. In verse 23, it says, he went and lived in a city called Nazareth. Now this is much harder than you would think because now we don't know how long that they sojourned in Egypt for. Some people say it was a few months. Some people say it was long as eight years.

But we know that like, man, when you live in a foreign land and you want to get home, it is so nice to be able to get home to the people you know, the neighbors you knew, the family you knew. Not only that, Judea was the place where they grew up. It was the place of Joseph and Mary's family inheritance. It was the place where they would be able to most prosper, to step into those things.

But now they can't, they can't go there because now they got this murderous psychopath who seems to be carrying on by, by historic accounts, seems to be carrying on the torch of his dad. So where's the best place then not to be found? Well, you go where no one wants to go. And that's Nazareth of Galilee.

[10 : 46] Small, insignificant, poor. I mean, Nazareth has such a bad reputation that one of Jesus's disciples, when they found out he was from Nazareth, said, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Like, first, talk about putting your foot in your mouth, for one thing. And then second, like, ouch, man, that's like, I mean, casting shade on this place. Nazareth wasn't really known in that day for producing Israel's finest. But that's where God chooses to grow up. That's where he chooses to, like, make his mark. And like, that's his pedigree. It's not a fancy one. It's not very noble. It's where nothing good comes from. And this is good news for us because it means for you and me, there is a Savior who lived humble and poor. And so Jesus knows what it's like to live in lack. Jesus didn't just come out of a palace to slum it with us for a few short weeks. He lived his whole life on earth as a poor man from Nowhereville. Now, I want to say this. Think about this. It's one thing to live a hard life because you have to when you got no choice and you can't get out of it. It's another thing to live a hard life because you're choosing to. Think about this. Everyone who grows up or lives in the ghetto wants to get out of there if they can, right? Jesus, he moved into it and he stayed there.

Nobody does that. No millionaires are moving into the trailer park. And no one living in a trailer park, if they're winning the lottery, is saying like, ah, you know what? I'm just, this is nice. I'm going to stay here. They're getting up and they're getting out. But Jesus doesn't do that.

Jesus chose to live with lack. He chose to stay in it even when he could have bailed out at any moment. And it's not because it was easier for him than anyone else. It was hard.

He suffered. He experienced everything. Everyone else around him was experiencing and he persevered. And you know why he did that? Because he loves you and me so much. And that is our good news. There is a savior, a king who gets us. He knows our suffering. He is familiar with it. And that is where he likes to be, right there in the difficult and despised places. And you know what? He's not going to bail out on you. He's not going to bail out on us. I want to say this to you. If you're here, are you suffering? Are you experiencing anxiety, worry, desperate? Are you feeling overwhelmed? Are you feeling poor and needy? Are you living in lack? Have you lost more than you think you can handle? Have you come in with like the burdens of sin and shame and guilt thinking like this is too much to bear?

Well, Jesus isn't running from you. He's not looking at you as like, oh my goodness, here's people with a whole bunch of problems. I'm out of here. No, you know what? And he wants to move towards you. He wants you to invite you. He wants you to invite him into that place because he would love to join you there because he knows and he understands. And when you and I believe this about Jesus, it is so freeing and it is so empowering because you begin to live in an authentic relationship with Jesus that has no pretense anymore. You don't have to pretend to him. You begin to experience one of the greatest gifts of what it means to know Jesus is that Jesus has compassion for the needy. One scholar, he rightly points out that compassion is the emotion most often attributed to Jesus during his ministry. It's what we see in the Bible. And what is most interesting about that is kind of what preceded Jesus's compassion was his looking. He would look at people. That's what he was known for. We see that all through the Bible. It would start with Jesus saw and then it said his heart went out to that person or he felt compassion for them. We think about before he fed the 5,000, he looked at them and he said, he looked at the crowd and he sees, oh, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And so on and on it goes.

[15 : 00] And Jesus's encounters with people, he is this great loving savior who looks and then gets moved with compassion and moves toward them in love. Why? Because he feels great pity for us because of his great love for us. Now we don't like that because man, we don't want to be pitied, right? We don't want to be that person. We don't want to be the charity case. Our pride says, uh, uh, uh, not for me. I'm, I'm too big for that. I'm too important for that. I'm too proud for that. We want to keep that intact. We got our dignity, we think. And yet God says, you know what? I resist the proud, but I give grace to the humble.

And I want to say this because we can think like, oh, being needy is about material stuff. Being needy isn't about your economic status. I've known proud and arrogant, poor people, and I've known humble, needy, rich people. It isn't about the size of your bank account. It is about the awareness of your spiritual poverty. That's what we're talking about here. Think about this. The wise men are a great example of this in this story. What do they do? They are wealthy men. They got gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That's what wealthy people have. And they come and they find this young child and they come and they bow themselves before and they worship him and give him those gifts.

Rich or poor, the hardest thing to do is to be okay with the fact that you're needy, that you need help, that you don't have it all together, that you're not okay. But when we do that, when we embrace that, when we accept that, we humble ourselves that way, we open ourselves up to receiving God's love.

And when we are loved by Jesus like that, we can then love like Jesus. And let me just say this, that's not easy to do. It is not easy to love like God loves us. I mean, that's putting others first.

That's being willing to always be getting lower in order to lift themselves up. It's a life of sacrifice. Now, again, that sounds nice, not easy to do. We naturally prefer not to move towards others, right? We want to step back. We want to detach. We want to stay removed. We want to judge and analyze from a distance. It's safe for us. But love doesn't do that. It compels us to move toward others, even our enemies, in order to understand them and to know them and to hear them.

[17:17] And to even risk feeling compassion for them. And that's costly. And that is unnatural. But that's what makes it divine. I want to tell you a little story of how this works, right? A friend of mine, Rick, is actually right over here. He was coaching some kids in basketball, some youths, let's say, some teenagers. And so like what we do as coaches, we're trying to help them out. And so we're correcting the mistakes they're making. Well, one mom, she didn't like that. And so she, during a break, put Rick on blast in front of everybody publicly, right? Now you could say that he was treated unfairly and misunderstood in that moment. Now pride would say, punch back. Oh, you're going to talk to me that way. Well, guess what? I have some words for you too.

But love absorbs the wrong. And then it leans in to understand. And Rick chose the path of love. Now he didn't avoid her. He didn't ignore her. And he didn't judge her. He moved toward her to listen and to understand. And something happened along the way for him. The indignation for being treated unfairly, it's dissipated and began to turn into compassion. And something else happened. This mom felt heard and understood. And because of that, Rick, she was open to Rick giving her some much needed truth that, hey, you know what? Probably be good to dial down your Karen a little bit.

For your son's sake. All right. Sorry to all the Karens in the room. I guess the name had to be chosen. And that's the one that was chosen. But in the end, what happened?

What happened? God was glorified, right? He was glorified in what Rick did, in Rick's heart. It helped the mom. It helped her son. And at the end of the day, but it did cost Rick something.

He had to humble himself. He had to swallow his pride. He had to let go of standing up and saying, you know what? I don't deserve to be treated that way. I'm going to show them. When you open yourself up to Jesus's compassion, you will be filled with it. You will be filled with his kind of compassion. You will be filled with his love. And from that place, you can love others like Jesus loves you. But it all starts with seeing yourself rightly.

[19:37] You and I, we have to get to a place where we agree with the psalmist's word. Psalm 86.1 says this, incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. Why? For I am poor and needy. Would you and I begin to see ourselves? That's who we truly are. We are the poor and we are the needy. We are the ones who need help. We are the ones who need Jesus so desperately.

Man, Jesus will come into that place. Most of Jesus's life was lived in exile and obscurity. Yet, even when he began his public ministry, he remained humble. He remained among the humble. His fame didn't earn him popularity or prosperity. His ministry wasn't flashy or entertaining. He didn't choose that way. It says the prophet Isaiah prophesying about him, the suffering servant.

It says this about Jesus. This is how you're going to know who he is. He was a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief. Kind of sounds like Jesus was like a moody teenager, but that's not what it's saying here. Let me explain it this way. I was watching a movie recently with my boy, Rory. It was called A Boy Named Christmas. And a line in it really struck me. And this line came after this boy had just witnessed his father fall to his death and he's languishing in sorrow because he loved his dad.

And his close companion on his journey said this to him, grief is the price we pay for love, but it's always worth it. Think about that. Grief is the price we pay for love, but it is always worth it.

And that is what Emmanuel in our weakness means for us. Emmanuel in our wondering and our suffering and our sorrows. Jesus, he was a man of sorrow. He was acquainted with our grief. Why? Because grief is the price he paid to love us. His love for us drove him to put on our weakness and wonder with us.

[21 : 53] He chose the hard road of humility, exile in Egypt, and then the humble road of obscurity, growing up a poor kid in Nazareth. And then one day he would take the ultimate road of grief and humility because of his great love for us. He would carry his cross to Calvary, not in obscurity, but for all to see, despised by many. And in this way, he humbled himself unto death, not despising the shame of the cross.

And so we can trust that this Jesus, this savior that was born and he chose the hard road, he is Emmanuel. He is God with us in our wondering. And he is Emmanuel, God with us for our wondering.

He's with us today. And wise men, just like the wise men of old, wise men still draw near to worship him. And as we close and the band comes up, how can you, how can we respond to this? How can we respond to this truth? I want to say, if you're in the room, you're listening to me, you're not yet a follower of Jesus.

We're going to take communion in a moment, but I would say, man, your first step isn't to come to communion. It's to come to the one that communion points to, to Jesus himself. And he invites you to come as you are. Like, you don't have to be like the wise men, like, man, the only way I can get an audience with Jesus is I better bring some gold and frankincense. And my man, Jesus says, no, no, no, no.

You can come empty handed. You can come with your failures. You can come with your sins. You can come with your hurt. You can come with your suffering and you can bring them to him because he wants them.

[23 : 36] He wants them. He's not going to reject you for those things. Actually, he's going to move towards you even more because of that. In a moment, we're going to have a chance for you to respond. And I just want you to know that, man, all those things that you can bring to him, he took with him to the cross. It was put on him there. Give it to him, release it to him, and then receive his righteousness, receive his peace, receive his joy, receive his goodness. There's going to be a prayer that you can pray in a moment. And we are promised by God himself that says, man, when we confess our sins and repent and turn to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us.

Now, if you're here and you're already a follower of Jesus, how is God calling you to respond? What does that look like? And before we're going to come to the table, take a moment, take a moment that to realize that Jesus wants to join you. He wants to join you in this life of wondering, this life of wondering and the difficulty and the futility of this fallen world that brings suffering and hurt and pain.

He wants to join you in that place. Maybe you came in carrying some sin and shame, the guilt of those things. He wants to join you in that place. He wants to bring healing. He wants to bring comfort. He wants to bring peace. Maybe you're coming in this time of the year, maybe some things that have happened, you are just dealing with some grief that feels impossible to bear. Jesus wants to join you in that.

He does. We never walk alone, friends. In our wonderings, God is with us. Emmanuel. So before you come to the table, I'm going to give us some time just to meet with him and engage with him. And then when you're ready, come and get the elements and then take it back to your seat and take communion when you're ready. But let me just pray for us and then we can continue on. So Lord, we come to you, a great Savior, a gracious Savior, a merciful Savior, we thank you that you are Emmanuel with us. You invite us to come to you. Meet us with what we have. It's not impressive.

But Lord, that's where you like to, it's the space you like to enter into. Pray for my friends as they come and to take communion. They would be reminded that you are the one who suffered ultimately for us, your body broken for us, your blood shed for us.

[26 : 23] And as they take a few moments to continue to engage with you right now and meet with you right now, meet them where they're at. Pray in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.