

## 2. God with Us!

### The Encounter – Series

Ps. Waweru Njenga 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017

### Sermon Notes



We are going through a sermon series dubbed **#theEncounter**. In it, we are analysing some of the common phrases and names associated with the Christmas story. We are striving to interrogate or cross-examine the meaning or impact the phrases or names should have whenever we mention or remember them through this festive season.

Last Sunday Pst. Unia kicked off the series for us with the sermon titled **“Unto Us a Child”** .....It was great just to be reminded of some of the names ascribed to our Messiah whose birth we are celebrating this Christmas season .....If you are at a place where you need **wisdom to choose** wisely (He is a wonderful counsellor) If You are in a place where you are **faced by the impossible** and the odds are stacked against you( He is the Almighty God)....you are in that place where **anxiety and worry** have ravaged you ...you don't have to worry or fret about anything, He is the prince of peace)!!

Today we are continuing with the series as we interact with this Child, the Messiah, Our Lord and Savior who is anointed the King of all Kings, Greatest Prophet and our High Priest.

If you can walk with me through your childhood or those of us who are parents, you must agree with me that there is no moment more awaited in a child's life as when daddy is coming home. In fact there is even a Hollywood movie titled daddy's home. Daddy coming home means various things a treat, fun, family time, protection, power, authority once in a while punishment, most of us are familiar with the phrase *“wacha daddy akuje nyumbani “*

In the same way Daddy's coming home is significant to us; consider that same phenomenon in the Old Testament, these involve a number of times when God appeared to His people. **Whenever God showed up, there was always a show down.** A closer observation of this marvel or wonder suggests that probably God seems to have a preference for, choosing dramatic or even sometimes petrifying ways to show up... loud thunderous voice, blazing fire, pillar of cloud, stormy rushing winds, earthquake etc.

**QOD:** For those of us who can remember our Sunday school, .... ***which of the dramatic ways in which God appeared to his people do you find most fascinating and why?***

As maybe some of you have mentioned .....some of those fascinating moments include: the numerous times he appeared to **Abraham** as a man or as the angel of the Lord; There is an account of the patriarch **Jacob** wrestling all night with a man who finally disabled him. God first came to **Moses** in the form of a blazing fire from the midst of a bush that did not burn out; this is followed by the 10 plagues of Egypt, parting of the Red seas and the Jordan River, manna and quails from heaven, water from a rock... signs, wonders and miracles at every turn... Moses seems to have had such numerous encounters with God that at some point he makes a request to see God's face , God tells him there is no way any man can see God's face and remain alive . **To the children of Israel**, he is the pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day. **To Elijah**, He is the Lord who is a consuming fire and still small voice, God also appears like a man in the burning furnace to the three Hebrew boys.

**It is with this background of God's dramatic appearances that the Israelis were awaiting the most important event in the history of their interaction with their God.....The Coming of their Messiah.....To an average mind all those previous manifestations of God's appearance were just but curtain raisers and If curtain raisers had thunder, how much more the main act?.....if the curtain raiser had earthquake, what about the main act? If the curtain raiser had flashes of lightning how much more the main act!!!!**

The birth of the Messiah, the most awaited moment of history comes. Drum rolls! Going by the previous episodes, this must and will be MELODRAMATIC, drama galore, at a whole NEW LEVEL! High expectations in the air, angels on high alert, creation has been waiting.

Turn with me to the gospel of **Matthew 1:18 – 25**,

**18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: this 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 fulfil 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’).**

**24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

God comes as a child! A CHILD! God comes as a child. As if that’s not enough, the child is born to an **ordinary engaged couple**, is it a letdown, or is there a reason? What is with this low key entry? Why is God not making a grand entry?

The way I see it, going with the history of the previous grand entries; God realized that signs miracles and wonders may not necessarily achieve for him what He Supremely wanted ..... (It may end up being another fireworks moment that simply sizzles out, e.g. New Year resolutions story).

So God changed tact and come in a way that would best help him achieve His supreme desire ... building Intimate relationships with mankind!!! Hence the name Immanuel...it’s as if God himself knew that if he wanted to go far with this human beings, he would have to be one of them and walk with them... it is as if through this humbling gesture, God is saying my dearly beloved children, here I am, today I am one of you.

The way I see it, mankind was the crown or pinnacle of God’s creation here on earth. **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27). Only man is made in God’s image or likeness. What better nature to clothe himself in than to take on man’s image, be fully man and fully God. I believe because of the invaluable investment God had put in man by creating him in His image and likeness ...**there is no way he was going to let go of mankind!**

Right from Genesis to Revelation we see this .....

He spends time with Adam and Eve in the garden, Enoch walks with God until he is no more, He delivers the children of Israel from Egypt so that they can be with Him(Exodus 29:46-....that I may dwell among them....) Jesus chooses the 12 disciples so that they may be with him (Mark 3:14)..... Ultimately...when all has been said and done..... The final script of the story suggests that God will move His dwelling among men!

**“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:1-3).**

**For God to be with us... He HAD TO GO OUT OF HIS WAY!!!**

**This is the story of God saying – It is not enough for me to be a FORCE to be bowed to, or an IDEA to be believed in. I am coming to you – I want a RELATIONSHIP with you.** And what better way than to come as one of you, to embrace and be embraced by humanity. ....Hence the name Immanuel..... I am one of you

As John 1:14 puts it, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

**This is the story of an unapproachable God tearing down every wall to become approachable!** This is the story of God doing everything to get near to us. To be with us. God leaving everything behind, to embrace humanity! God went to infinite heights to have a personal relationship with us.

*“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness). His nature, His position, His Glory did not matter or hold Him back from reaching to us (Philippians 2: 6- 7).*

In creating Man differently from the rest of creation God was taking a calculated risk. Not only was man created in God’s likeness, He was also given the free will to choose either to follow God or follow another path, and man chose the other path. Through the sin of disobedience, man was separated from God. The birth of our saviour Jesus Christ is God’s redeeming plan to restore. Through the Messiah, man is offered a chance to make the right choice that can counter the original sin.

His grand entry as “son of man” enables Him to straightaway identify with the crisis man is facing as a result of the fall. The fall not only affected our relationship with God, but also with self, fellow humans, and creation. As we journey through life, life has a way of throwing in unexpected curves in the road – situations we didn’t see coming – happenings we didn’t plan for – apparent setbacks: - the accident you didn’t see coming, the medical report you didn’t expect; losing someone without warning and the list goes on and on.

### **(BORN INTO SCANDAL)**

From the passage we just read, we that our saviour’s grand entry into the world is accompanied by a curve ball. Jesus mother is found to be with child at the time of betrothal. Imagine with me Joseph’s predicament, a real “catch-22” situation. You see Moses law clearly stated that an adulterous woman was to be taken outside the town and stoned to death. Josephs head told him that she must die but his heart told him otherwise. Mavuno we must give it up for the man Joseph, when life squeezed what comes out with regards to His faith and Character is praiseworthy. The bible says that Joseph was “faithful to the law, just, righteous”. A moral and merciful man. Instead of disgracing Mary so that he could be cleansed and His reputation restored, He chose to divorce her quietly so that they could both start their lives over again. What a perfect example of unconditional and sacrificial love portrayed in the midst of betrayal, rejection and dejection. How many of us would be willing to overlook our spouses’ faults (unfaithfulness, infidelity, adultery) and choose to forgive and forget. **God was with Joseph in the midst of his dilemma, his dilemma was God’s dilemma**

It would be wrong of me to leave this here because, this is not the end of the story. As noble as this decision looked, it was not God’s plan for Joseph and Mary. You see this was the choice that seemed best in Josephs own mind and that would benefit Mary the most. To his credit, Joseph did not make an emotional decision, he took his time to think, to contemplate, to ponder. He reasoned it all out, Weighed out all the options and came to a rational, logical, level headed decisions. However it was not the noblest of decisions because he did not take the time to seek God, pray, fast and wait on God. Where was God in the midst of Joseph’s deliberations? **God must be with us in the midst of our deliberations. We must make deliberations bearing his will and purpose for us in mind.**

It is not our righteous acts that should prevail but God’s untainted righteousness. Joseph first responsibility to his betrothal was to provide for her physical, emotional and spiritual needs and to protect her. If a man truly loves and cherishes his wife, he would not be willing for any harm to befall her. Relinquishing his responsibilities as a husband and father was not God’s will for Joseph. His purpose was to love and lead Mary.

Furthermore, what Joseph perceived to be unfaithfulness was in fact fulfillment of God’s prophecy **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”** (Isaiah 7:14). **He simply had to believe God because He said so. He had to trust God on his bare word** and that faith OFTEN defies logic or reason. LOGIC said Mary had been unfaithful; FAITH said “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”.

**After much deliberations regarding the dilemmas we are facing, our final decisions must be according to God’s will.** God had given Joseph specific instructions for his family - and he followed them. One must be ready to accept God’s Will, whatever it might be. Trusting that His will is the best thing for us. In other words we must pray things over until the path of God’s duty became clear. Then we must put our faith to action. Joseph’s divine dream put everything in God’s perspective, and his obedience helped change the salvation story.

Walking in God's will by faith, obedience and trust is not always easy. It is hard to live by faith. If God always does what we expect Him to do, then maybe it's easy to have faith. But when God doesn't do what we expect, then it's hard. By saying yes! Joseph was not aware of what was in store for him. But it wasn't long until he discovered that there are hardships & sacrifices that came about because of their marriage. You try convincing your social network that the child your fiancée is carrying is conceived of the Holy Spirit. Up to the end, very few people believed that Jesus was the Messiah, in fact at the beginning of God's ministry, this is the description we hear of Him *"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"* (Matthew 13:55)

Joseph and Mary must have stigmatized, shamed, shunned and ostracized by family and friends. Pregnancy in and of its own comes with its own inconveniences, try having one under suspicion. Moreover, the threat on the lives of members of the family costed them both their time and financial resources.

Was it worth the cost, most definitely? You see their son was our savior. Joseph's love for Mary reveals the greatest love story of all, the story of God's unconditional, sacrificial and unfailing love for His people despite their sin.

Good people *the Story of Christmas is the story of Immanuel...* the story of God going out of His way to re-connect with you and I..... the question we should approach this season with is this.....the question that we should leave this service with is this; ...**How much will you and I be willing to go out of our way in response to God's gesture of getting out of His way?**

What heights have you or will you go to in order to get to know him? What cost will you be willing to pay to get close to Him in response to the price He paid to get close to you?

***He went out of His way for you, will you go out of your way for Him?***

Going out of His way meant one word.....COST!!!!.... getting out of your way for him will also mean the same thing....COST!!! So if I may ask, what will it cost you to realize intimacy with Christ?

***He went out of His way for you, will you go out of your way for Him?***

**Will it be Time?** – The building of any relationship requires the deliberate allocation of significant chunks of time, the same is true of our relationship with God. This will require time .....**time** to pray, **time** to fellowship with other members of His body, **time** to read God's word.....**time** to serve him

**Will it be your Reputation?** – Moments will come where because of you value your relationship with God you will have to go against the flow and as a result you will attract significant criticism..... This may injure your reputation ..... What people will say? (For Mary it meant people having to talk about her **getting a child out of wedlock**, for Joseph, you can imagine what people had to say about him accepting that child)

**Will it be Discipline?** – The discipline of putting in the hard work of being consistent with spending time with God...especially when you don't feel like it..... It's not about a feeling like....it's about a commitment to!!! Following him every day. The discipline of saying NO to certain things and YES to what God would want of me.....

**Will it be well laid plans?** – Think about it Joseph and Mary had their plans well laid out...their wedding committee was in full gear...they had even identified suppliers and the wedding venue.....then BOOM!!!! Their lives were suddenly interrupted, inconvenienced..... Will there be a willingness on your end to be sometimes interrupted, inconvenienced to advance His interests?

***He went out of His way for you, will you go out of your way for Him?***

As we pray I want to invite us to consider a time of reflection ....and in that time I want you to consider the adjustments that you may need to make to enhance your relationship with God, write a list of things you may need to drop to realize a richer relationship with God....Things you may need to embrace to realize a richer relationship with God.

**Prayer:** Salvation and Rededication