

February 19/20, 2013
John 18:3-12

Midweek 2
Names of Wondrous Love – Immanuel

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

Can we even imagine a scene in heaven like this? The Father speaks to His one and only begotten and beloved Son. “Son,” he says, “the only way to free mankind from sin’s curse is for you to take on human flesh and put yourself in mankind’s place. To become a speck of cells in a woman’s womb and to be born a helpless child (in a manger). To become man so that you can be the perfect substitute for mankind not only under the law but also on the cross that all law-breaking sinners deserve.” We don’t really know how the dialogue went already way back in eternity when God planned the salvation of mankind whom he had not yet created. But we do know the Son’s response. It was willing obedience to his Father’s plan and wondrous love for unlovable sinners, love far beyond our comprehension.

So when the fullness of time came, Christ who was God from all eternity became true man. He didn’t give up his deity but added his humanity to his person. He became the God-man, one person, but with a divine and a human nature. Behind this miracle was the divine plan of salvation. As God, Christ gave the laws; as a man, he was subject to them. And as the God-man, his perfect keeping of the law now counts for you and me. As God he could not die; as man he was mortal. And as the God-man he did die, and with his holy, precious blood he made sufficient payment for all sins.

Some seven hundred years before Bethlehem, God used his prophet to put a name on this miracle. “The virgin shall conceive and will give birth to a son, and will call his name Immanuel,” Isaiah foretold. Some months before the birth of Jesus, the angel repeated those same words to Joseph. Immanuel they called this wonderful baby. That name means very simply “God with Us,” a name truly filled with wondrous love.

As we look at this name of Jesus we will look at the proof that He is God with us and then also look at the promise that God is with us.

Not many recognized that Jesus was “God with us,” because he put aside the use of his divine powers. He still had them but only occasionally used them (such as when he healed people and forgave people) so that he could walk the road to Calvary’s cross. But that night outside the Garden of Gethsemane, we get a glimpse. I wonder what Malchus, the high priest’s servant, would tell us about Jesus? Fingering his ear sliced off by the rash swoop of Peter’s sword and then sealed back on by Jesus’ loving hand, Malchus must have wondered, “Who is this Jesus anyway? Where did he get such power?” I often wonder if he came to faith in Jesus after that experience.

The soldiers who came forward with robe to tie Jesus’ hands must have wondered too. How different the arrest of this so-called criminal had been. They had come with their lanterns to comb the shadows of the garden for a dangerous suspect only to have him

walk forward to meet them. They had come ready to fight off his followers only to hear him tell them to put their weapons away. Even stranger was how they had been knocked suddenly and helplessly flat on their backs after the suspect had simply said, "I am he." Picking themselves up, wondering what Jesus would do next, they must have stepped forward rather hesitantly to slap the handcuffs on him. They ended up arresting him, but had they really? They could hardly say they had overpowered him. It was more as he was letting them arrest him, more as if he was going willingly with them. If they had been students of the Old Testament, they might have recalled the words of Isaiah chapter 53, "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." No, this was no ordinary man whom they were arresting. This was Immanuel, the God-man in wondrous love going silently, willingly to the slaughter.

What about the One who was arrested? What would he say? He could hardly say, "I didn't know where it would all lead to." In verse 4 of our text, we are told, "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?'" The God-man knew what was coming. He knew about the cruel punches that would bruise his face. The sharp thorns that would rip his scalp. The sadistic whip that would chew up his back. The cruel nails that would puncture his flesh. The fires of hell that would sear his soul. All this he knew, and yet willingly let them tie his hands. Nor could he say, "I couldn't do anything else." This was the almighty Lord, before whom Samson of old, tearing Delilah's strong ropes like so much string, looked like a 90-pound weakling. This was the almighty Lord, who with one snap of his fingers could have had 72,000 angels there to surround him and who with one sentence had already placed his would-be captors on the ground.

We really don't have to ask what Jesus would have said that night in the garden. He already said it earlier. In John 10:17-18, He declared, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and take it up again." Jesus would speak to us of willingness, of willing love for sinners that tied his hands tighter than any rope, of willing love for sinners that compelled him to carry out the Father's plan of salvation.

Do we want proof that Jesus is truly Immanuel – "God with us"? Even more so, do we want proof that he truly loves us? How can we doubt this glorious face if we have been watching and listening as the God-man is arrested in the garden?

Immanuel is his name. We've seen proof of how his name fits. Now let's see what it means for us. Is there any promise for us in that name of wondrous love? Where should we start but with the promise of salvation that name contains. Our God is not far off in the heavens, glancing at us from time to time across the miles. He's here with us in our sins, not to cause them or to share in them but to save us from them. We no longer have to fear his presence at our side, as if he's checking up on us and keeping tabs on how often we fall. Instead, he stands before us in his Word with those comforting words: "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven." He's there in his Holy Supper,

giving us the very body and blood that he used to pay for our sins. Our Immanuel has promised never to leave us or forsake us, but to surround us with his forgiveness.

He's "God with us" also in our troubles. He knows what they are like. HE suffered many of them himself. Is it grief caused by the loss of a loved one? He knows, having wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. Is it temptation that never seems to leave us alone? He knows, as one who faced Satan's relentless attacks from the beginning to the end of his earthly ministry. Is it loneliness brought on by unfaithful friends? He knows, having experienced the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter. Not only does he know but he can do something about our troubles as the God-man who can do anything.

He's "God with us" also in our feeble attempts at serving him. When it's two steps forward and three steps backward on the path of sanctified living, he knows. When it's our sinful nature getting once again the upper hand in daily battle with our new man, he knows. He's there to whisper in our ears, "Don't give up. Remember, I have already paid for your sins, and I remember your failings no more. Remember that I'm here to strengthen you through Word and Sacrament so that you can walk more closely with me. Remember I am Immanuel – "God with you".

And he will be "God with us" when our last moment comes. We know not when that time will be. But we do know who will be there at our side when it comes. When the walk through the valley of the shadows faces us, what comfort to be able to say, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me." What comfort to know that he's well acquainted with the valley of death because he has walked it before us. What comfort to know that though the shadows may threaten us, they can't harm us because he has paid for sin and conquered death. What comfort to know our walk will end in heaven at his side where we can say to him who love has brought us here, "Now I am always with you."

We can't leave the Garden of Gethsemane without one more look at our Immanuel. Listen to what he's telling us in his wondrous love. "Don't you see," he tells us, "I let them tie me that I might untie you." "Don't you see," he says, "with the crimson scissors of my blood I've cut through the cords of sin that bound you hand and foot for Satan's service and for hell's confinement." "Don't you see," he says, "you're free—free from sin, free from Satan, free from death, free to live for me on earth, and free to live with me in heaven."

Lord, help us never to lose sight of our Immanuel and of his wondrous love. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our Lenten King. Amen.