

“Emmanuel”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

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### **Opening Prayer**

Good morning, welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be worshipping with you today. We humbly pray that you would find our congregation to be loving, friendly, and most importantly Godly. I am excited to be back here with you after two Sundays off. I got my big buck, relaxed out in the cold, and did a whole bunch of praying for you folks in the process. We are now passed Thanksgiving, and we find ourselves already in the heart of the Advent Season. Advent is a season of expectation, of hope, for the coming Messiah. We usually equate it with the expectation of Christmas presents, time spent together with our families, and great traditions. However, in the church all of those things are overshadowed by the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, Emmanuel.

There is a very real reason why we celebrate Christmas and Advent Beloved. We celebrate this season because it marks the coming Jesus in human flesh. We celebrate this season because it is a wonderful promise realized, and it reminds us that there is a coming promise that is also great. It starts for us today in our reading from Matthew. We read through the entire first chapter of the first Gospel. It may seem strange to you that we spent time on more than just the traditional stuff today. We all kind of expect to hear about Joseph and Mary and Baby Jesus, but what is the deal with the genealogy at the beginning of this book? Why does this exist, and why should we care? What does it even have to do with Christmas? Beloved, it has everything to do with Christmas, and with us individually.

In verse two we see that the genealogy begins with someone that you may have heard of, the patriarch Abraham. If you have been around our churches for a while then you have heard me preach a bit about this guy. He was the one who first received a great promise from the Lord, this promise that through his lineage that all the earth would be blessed. That the people, who were in need of being saved, would be saved by someone in Abraham's direct line. In Genesis 12:3 the Lord says to Abraham "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." This great promise, this coming blessing, is something that was further announced down the genealogical line to King David, another guy you may be familiar with. David was arguably the greatest king in Israel's history, and to him the Lord promises something very similar. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7:12-13 God says to David via the prophet Nathan "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." The astute of you may know that David's son, Solomon, was a great king who did indeed build God's temple in Israel. However Solomon's kingdom didn't last forever... the promise was not only for the people in David's time, but also for those in the future. That promise, this blessing, this established kingdom, is realized not in any great prophet, any great king, any expected way... rather it is realized in a baby boy, born humbly in a manger in a backwater part of the world. Of course this was no ordinary boy, this was Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus the Christ.

"Behold, the virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, 'God with us.'"

That verse, from the end of our reading in Matthew, is based upon a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. It reads in Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” Pretty straightforward prophecy, if a fantastic and impossible one for us as humans to realize on our own. Every Christmas season we hear about this promise. Every year we talk about how the Lord came down as a baby boy. Every year we talk about the Word becoming flesh, as is mentioned in our second reading. Beloved, just because we know these truths in our minds, that Jesus being the promised descendent came to establish an everlasting kingdom who is God in human flesh, doesn’t mean that we should take them for granted. We should never forget what it really means for “God to be with us.”

I want you to take a moment and to look at your hands. Look at the creases and the lines, the callouses if you have them, your fingernails and your scars. Beloved Congregation, don’t forget that the Creator of everything, the Ruler of All, the Lord of Lords the King of Kings, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Omnipotent, the LORD, came and took on flesh and had those same features that your hands have. Ten fingers, skin, hair, etc. He had them all. God with us doesn’t just mean in some spiritual mystical way, but physically God came and lived a human life with us. He came as the promised one, the blessing, that all of humanity desperately needed. No one can take our sins from us except on who is perfect. Jesus, God in human flesh, fully human and fully divine, is the only answer. He is the only one who could take away our sins. It isn’t upon us to be “good people,” that isn’t good enough. It isn’t upon some fantastical person to come and lead us in the right way, no one is perfect except for the Lord. So the Lord Himself came down, took on flesh, and was born. He came to save us. He came to

heal us. He came to make a way for us because we could not, and because the Lord Himself desperately loves us. Jesus is that promised one, the one that so many generations of people looked forward. Jesus is the promised one, the blessing that place our hopes upon knowing that He has done what we could not. John 1:16-17 should speak largely to those of us who call upon Jesus as our Savior. They read “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” Did you catch that? Grace and truth were realized in that baby boy, born in a manger, born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. Our hopes rested upon, and continue to rest upon, Emmanuel.

I hope you listen and understand Beloved, this is no small thing that God came and dwelt among us. That the Word, another name for Jesus that exists throughout scripture prior to His birth, became flesh. Just as you and I are alive and breathing, so too was our Lord. Just as you and I look in the mirror, work with our hands, walk, and speak, so too did Jesus, just without sin. I hope you will never look at your hands the same way again, that they would be a reminder that God so loved you that He was willing to come to earth in human flesh, to redeem you and me. Knowing these truths, that Jesus came to bear our sins because we could not, you may be wondering what your right response should be. How should we implement the truth that God came and was “Emmanuel?”

Beloved Congregation, if you count yourself as the Lord’s, if you are one who has received that promised blessing of eternal salvation, then your life should be bearing it out even during the hectic holiday season. Practically speaking, although Christmastime is supposedly based around Jesus’s birth, in reality many of us stray from the Lord in this

time. We get caught up in the hubbub, the difficulty of hosting or traveling, the trials of being around family. Practically, if you take God being with us seriously, you should be living out that promised blessing even in these times. That relative that you hate being around, you should be praying earnestly for them this season. The gifts that you buy, make sure you save a couple for those who are less fortunate than you. During the busyness of the season, make sure you carve out a generous portion of time for the one who deserves it the most, the Lord. The Lord came two thousand years ago as He promised He would, and lived and breathed and worked just as you and I do in human flesh. He lived the perfect life that you and I could not, so that we might know our Lord for forever. In this time of the year, when it is so easy to pay lip service to the Creator but not really serve Him, we should not be shying away from the Lord but running towards Him. Let your actions show that you take “Emmanuel” seriously. That His salvation rules within you even in the midst of stress. That your hope is secure not in presents, or the perfect family tradition, but rather that it is secure in Him who promised that hope. As we take communion this morning, it is the perfect time for us to center ourselves around Him. To thank Him for coming as a Baby to save the world. For living humbly as we do, so that we might live gloriously with Him forever. Beloved Congregation, that is worth celebrating. Praise the Lord, would you join me in prayer.

**Closing Prayer**