

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Peace is... God With Us

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 7:10-16 (NRSVUE)

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSVUE)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Bible/Sermon Focus

One of the most distinct, memorable teachings I had from my multiple Old Testament classes in seminary was that we were "not supposed to read Jesus into the Old Testament." I remember this being a key point of struggle for many of my fellow students. Our professor would go on to explain that, yes, the Jewish people wrote of an expected messiah. And that this *messianic expectation* arose around the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian periods. Our professor reminded us that many people had come and gone, claiming to be the messiah. Even though there was indeed an expected messiah, the Old Testament never calls that person by name. There are some Jewish people that are still waiting on the expected messiah.

For Biblical scholars, the claim that there was an expected messiah and the claim that Jesus

was the messiah are two separate claims. It is only when God becomes incarnate in the flesh that we can begin to talk about Jesus as the messiah. That particular baby, born in Palestine, in a war-ridden country where his parents lived as a occupied people - these particularities are where God showed up, where the messiah showed up.

Our particularities, our enfleshed, living and breathing bodies, are where God meets us. Not in some heaven, distant and undistinguishable. That the messiah is named Emmanuel, "God with us," has implications for how we understand God's relationship with the whole of creation, the entirety of the natural world.

We need not read Jesus back into the Old Testament, because Jesus, the enfleshed, fully divine, fully human person, came and walked among us, not in an ethereal, foreshadowed, way, but in a true and real and particular way.

Christ came and dwelt among us so that we could know peace. Peace in the midst of violence, peace when the world is raging, peace when there is no room for you available. The peace of God came and dwelt with the lowly and the down trodden, the sick and the vulnerable. God meets us in our particularities, as they are right now, and dwells with us.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you read Jesus into the Old Testament? When? Why or why not?
2. How does God meet you in your particularities?
3. Unpack and reflect on this quote from Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, *"According to the witness of Scripture, Jesus is a genuine Spirit-phenomenon...Through his human history the Spirit who pervades the universe becomes concretely present in a small bit of it; Sophia pitches her tent in the midst of the world; the Shekinah dwells among the suffering people in a new way. In a word, Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us."*
4. If "the One who was present in a particular body 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem is present in a particular body today...in the Church as the Body of Christ," what does that body look like?
5. How do your particularities support the enfleshed, Peaceable Kingdom?

Prayer

Emmanuel, God with us, God for us, God within and among and around us, we thank you. We thank you for our own particularities. We thank you for your tangible, enfleshed presence with us. And we thank you for the gift of this body, the church, in which we encounter your presence in such particular and meaningful ways. In your holy name, **Amen**.

John Wesley's final words: "The best of all is, God is with us."