



It seems almost trite and superfluous to say that the incarnation is the greatest statement, the greatest manifestation of love ever – but that doesn't make it untrue. The name Immanuel – God with us – is a profound and powerful statement of God's desire to be in intimate communion with human beings. The challenge for us is to recognise God's presence in all situations and circumstances. We can doubt God's love in times of grief, pain and trauma, but we find comfort, healing and strength when we are able to experience God's "with-us-ness" even in such times. And, when we are able to help others to recognise and experience God's presence and love in their lives – whatever they may be going through – then we have truly become Advent people.

May our worship overflow with proclamation and experience of God's ever-present love this week.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The First Reading - Isaiah 7: 10-16

A young woman will give her son the name Immanuel, meaning 'God is with us'. Isaiah's words were meant as encouragement to King Ahaz in dangerous times, but for us they will always have the profound meaning fulfilled in Mary and the birth of Jesus.

The Psalm - Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19

A prayer for God to forgive and restore God's people, and to send and empower the One God raises up to keep God's people from turning away from God.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

The Second Reading - Romans 1: 1-7

On the last Sunday before Christmas Day, we hear a reminder from Paul of the content of the Good News: that prophecy is fulfilled, that Christ is born a son of David, that he died and rose again - and calls us into his company.

The Gospel Reading - Matthew 1: 18-25

Mary conceives a child by divine grace, and to the worried Joseph there appears a dreamlike messenger with stranger words of assurance. This strange circumstance is safe in divine hands. '... and she will call her son Immanuel'.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%207:%2010-16%0Acw%20Psalm%2080:%201-7,%2017-19%0ARomans%201:%201-7%0AMatthew%201:%2018-25

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

CHILD/YOUTH: The season of Advent continues. Today we shall be lighting the candle of love.

ADULT: No other word so completely describes what we know of our God. For God so loved the world that a child was given....God's love in human form.

CHILD/YOUTH: We wait in hope and peace, and with joy.
The two purple candles and the pink candle are lit

ADULT: We light the candle of love to proclaim that God's love is revealed in the Child born in Bethlehem, and we are challenged to proclaim and reveal that same love as we live out our faith here in Ireland.

The purple candle is lit

We give thanks for a love that passes our human understanding, and we await once more the birth of God's enduring love this Christmas.
Amen

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Lord,
we beseech thee, give ear to our prayers,
and by thy gracious visitation
lighten the darkness of our hearts
by our Lord Jesus Christ;
who liveth and reigneth with thee
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Collect Two

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

God our redeemer,
who prepared the blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
Grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Loving God - as we approach the day of Christ's birth help us to throw wide the doors of our hearts in preparation. Help us to sense the importance of what happened so long ago when Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, to remember the words of the angels and the prophets and the teachers of old, and to celebrate all the promises that you made through them. Help us to take firm hold of the meaning of all these things and to know in the depths of our being that even now you are seeking to work in us and through us to fulfil the promises you have made.... Lord hear our prayer....

Lord - may this Christmas season be for us and for those around us a season of healing, may it be a season of hope and of love and of joy, may it be a time of true sharing and of rejoicing in all the earth.... Lord hear our prayer...

We pray O God for those in need around us: for those who need a second birth, for those who need a tender touch and a healing word.... Lord, hear our prayer...

We pray too, O God for the children of our world - and all those of tender faith, all those who have no home to call their home, all those who are hungry and thirsty. Bless we pray the innocent of the earth and all those who trust in you. Bless the humble and the powerless and bring down from their thrones those who full of pride and those who are indifferent... Lord, hear our prayer....

Bless we pray, too, each special one we name before you now... (BIDDING PRAYER)....
Lord hear our prayer....

We ask these things O God, with hope and praise in our hearts, our minds, and our souls, through Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.

— written by Richard J. Fairchild, and posted on his [Kir-shalom](#) website.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

Presider or deacon

As we wait with pregnant expectation for the coming of Jesus, let us offer prayers to God who sends his Son in the womb of a virgin.

Deacon or other leader

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

For N our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For travellers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the dying and the dead.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

Joining our voices with St _____ and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, desire of all nations and saviour of all peoples, come and save us, O Lord our God. Glory to you for ever.

Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Heavenly Father,
you have given us a pledge of eternal redemption.
Grant that we may always eagerly celebrate
the saving mystery of the incarnation of your Son.
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

O God of Elizabeth and Mary,
you visited your servants with news of the world's redemption
in the coming of the Savior.
Make our hearts leap with joy,
and fill our mouths with songs of praise,

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

that we may announce glad tidings of peace,
and welcome the Christ in our midst. Amen.

Brothers and sisters,
as we joyfully await the glorious coming of the Christ,
let us pray for the needs of the church, our community, and the world.
God of promise,
you have given us a sign of your love
through the gift of Jesus Christ, our Savior,
who was promised from ages past.
We believe as Joseph did
the message of your presence
whispered by an angel,
and offer our prayers for your world,
confident of your care and mercy for all creation. Amen.

Shepherd of Israel,
may Jesus, Emmanuel and son of Mary,
be more than just a dream in our hearts.
With the apostles, prophets, and saints,
save us, restore us,
and lead us in the way of grace and peace,
that we may bear your promise into the world. Amen.

Dearest God, as we contemplate the wonder of your birth, that you gave up your majesty
to become weak and vulnerable for us;
stir up in us the desire to consider
the needs and feelings of others,
before we think of ourselves.
Help us to be so willing to give of ourselves
that we may be an encouragement
to all whom we meet this Christmas time. Amen.

All-powerful God, let the splendour of your glory rise in our hearts like the
dawn, that the darkness of the night may be scattered and the coming of your
only Son may reveal us as children of the light. We ask this through Jesus
Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Let us rejoice in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life. By
Him we are born into the family of God, and made members of the body of
Christ; His witness confirms us; His wisdom teaches us; His power enables
us; He will do for us far more than we ask or think. Amen

God of the past, present and the future, of the old covenant and the new,
speak to us today. Amen

Come, O Lord, in much mercy down into my soul and take possession and

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

dwell there. A poor dwelling, I confess, for so glorious a Person as You. Yet, I am preparing for a fitting reception of you, by holy and fervent desires of your own inspiring. Enter then, and adorn my soul, and make it a worthy place for you to inhabit, since it is the work of your own hands. Give me yourself, without which, even if you should give me all that you ever have made, yet this would not satisfy my desires. Let my soul ever seek you, and let me persist in seeking, until I have found, and am in full possession of you. Amen. St. Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430)

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen

BENEDICTION

Go into this week blessed with the assurance that you are beloved by God, valued by Jesus Christ, strengthened by the Holy Spirit

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Isn't it strange . . . that things sometimes don't turn out the way you expect them to ...

It would be quite easy to imagine Joseph, Mary and their extended families preparing for the forthcoming marriage. Betrothal was an important social institution in the ancient world and parents or grandparents arranged marriage for their children from birth. Since social order in the ancient world was built upon relationships between extended families, marriage was a primary means to strengthen political alliances and economic ties between these families.

Normally, women from each clan would propose and negotiate the nuptial arrangement; the clan leaders would approve the union. So the proposed marriage of Mary and Joseph would have been common knowledge in their small community for many months, if not years. And just as Mary had been betrothed, she became pregnant. This certainly was not in the wedding plans of the mothers! It probably wasn't on Joseph's agenda either. Suddenly all that seemed to have been under control was thrust into turmoil. This wasn't turning out the way it was supposed to – all the best laid plans seemed to be in tatters.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

Because God had other ideas.

But the scope of His plan was mind boggling: a virgin birth. Like Joseph, we are sometimes challenged by the magnitude of God's plan for our own lives, especially if it doesn't necessarily fall in with our own small designs. God's will and our vision can often differ. Joseph was changed because of God's plan for his life. Written about 730 BC, the reading from Isaiah shows the threads of God's plan were laid long before Joseph was born and affect millions of people 2000 years after his death. And just as Joseph was changed by God's plan for his life, so we need to be open to be changed by his plan for us. As we reflect on the nativity, perhaps Christmas is a good time to ask ourselves how has God's plan affected each one of us personally? How has it changed our lives in ways which we've been unable to predict, ways which have surprised us, ways in which we did not plan?

Culture and experience tell us to take control, to plan for the future, and trust in our own abilities. A common question asked by management consultants is, 'Who is really in Control here?', shortly followed by, 'What decisions need to be made and who can make them?' They would have a hard time with the Christmas story, because Christmas presents an alternate view, a view which requires trust in God and the notion of someone else being in control. Life may get in the way of our plans, but we will have the strength to survive and thrive because we trust the One who is really in control.

We might not be in control - but God is.

And as we look towards the New Year perhaps its also a good time to ask ourselves what plans God may have for us in the coming year. Are we open to Him taking even just a little control? Dare we be as obedient to His call and plan as Joseph was? Do we believe that God might just want us to affect others so that His Kingdom comes, on earth, as in heaven? I wish you all a blessed Christmas and peaceful New Year. *The Reverend Dr Sam Cappleman*

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel', a name which means 'God with us', a name which signifies that two natures are united in this one person. Before time began He was God, born of the Father - but in the fullness of time he became Emmanuel, 'God with us', in the womb of his mother. Without ceasing to be what he had always been, he began in a wonderful fashion to be what we are, assuming our nature in such a way that he did not lose his own. But His coming was not all plain sailing!

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

By law, on hearing of her pregnancy, Joseph would have been entitled to return Mary to her father and expose her to death. But Joseph is an honourable man and determines to divorce her quietly. Perhaps in his sense of honour he hopes that the rightful father will claim the child and marry Mary. But even more remarkable is that here, in the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament, we begin to get the sense that the rules of the game are changing. That the strictures of the law which had guided the nations of Israel and Judah were beginning to be seen in a new light, a new light that demonstrated that the new era of living under grace and not the law was dawning as Emmanuel was indeed with us. An 'Emmanuel' who was not a product of human evolution, some pinnacle which represented the highest achievement of humanity to date, but an 'Emmanuel', as the name implies, who was, and is, the intervention of the transcendent God into human history from outside. Even as He was conceived, the law was beginning to be fulfilled as Joseph, mindful of the law, decided to believe the Lord that had spoken to him in a dream.

Unlike Ahaz in the Old Testament reading, Joseph seems to be open to believing that he might just be hearing the word of God, and acts on that belief. Ahaz, it would appear, preferred to believe in his own strength and a treaty with the king of Assyria! Joseph is open to hear the word of the Lord, even in his dreams. Ahaz, on the other hand, is closed, trusting only in his treaty. Joseph believes the promise of God and names the child "Jesus" in obedience to the dream, claiming him as his own. Ahaz refuses the promise of God, and suffers serious consequences. The king he trusted to protect him comes and conquers his land. If Joseph had acted like Ahaz, he would have trusted his own inclination and dismissed Mary quietly. If Ahaz had acted like Joseph, who knows how the history of God's people would have been changed?

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is both a mystery and a miracle. It's the stuff of Hollywood movies. A young virgin conceives a divine Son, a quiet boyfriend who believes in angels enough to listen to them, some poor agricultural labourers working at night going to see what all the fuss and commotion is about and ending up in a stable of smelly animals. And later, Eastern mystics turn up on the scene after allegedly following stars to get there to see what's happening and leave hugely expensive Christmas presents. And that's before the massacre of the innocents, the exile into Egypt, and the bizarre events of Jesus' early childhood. It would have been so easy for Joseph to believe that it had all been just a dream

But it wasn't just a dream, it wasn't a story in a Hollywood movie, it was the reality of an incarnate God coming among us. When we reflect on the Christmas story do we believe that God can still speak to us and intervene in the world today as He spoke to Joseph and intervened that first Christmas? Or do we think it was all just a dream? *Sam Cappleman*

LECTIONARY NOTES 3

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

The final Advent week before the Christmas celebration turns our attention to the significance of the name given in Isaiah's prophecy, and ascribed to Jesus by Matthew – Immanuel. The idea that God is with us may seem commonplace to us now, since we've heard it so many times, but for the ancient hearers of the Gospel, it must have sounded radical, or even scandalous. Yet, it reflects the intense longing within God for intimate union with humanity. It is a testament to God's unfailing, unconditional love, and is reinforced by all the readings this week. Isaiah speaks a prophecy which offers a sign of God's care and willingness to protect God's people to a king who has largely ignored God's law. The Psalm offers a prayer in faith and expectation that God cares for God's people and will send one who will lead and deliver them. Paul celebrates the Good News of God's kindness and the belonging we find in God through Christ. And, in a rather moving narrative, Matthew describes Joseph's love and care for Mary, which becomes something of a metaphor (whether intentional or not on Matthew's part) for the love of the God who is about to step physically into human affairs and experience.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: On the scale of global issues, love may seem to be completely irrelevant. When governments negotiate, when corporations strategise, when soldiers march, or when the weak and poor struggle to survive, what place is there for love? Yet, God must know something about love that we don't since love is the only command we have been given as followers of Christ. In truth, if love was the driving force behind our voting, our business dealings and our consumption, our dealings with friend and enemy, and our awareness and care of the most vulnerable, the world would be a far more whole place. How could a policy of love actually work out practically in the world, though? Perhaps if followers of Christ in places of influence began to embrace dialogue, collaboration and the quest to listen and understand, that would be a powerful first step. Secondly, if all followers of Christ chose to operate from love in whatever capacity we may engage in social and political structures – whether voting, volunteering, contributing, lobbying, petitioning, negotiating or communicating with leaders, this could have a transforming impact on the systems that operate in our world. Such a policy of love would inevitably impact economic realities (poverty and the gap between rich and poor) climate change, conflict, health care, immigration and xenophobia concerns, crime, exploitation and human trafficking in positive ways, because we could no longer remain uninvolved in the struggles of our world, and we could no longer choose the methods of expediency, dominance and self-service in our responses to our world's need. The Advent challenge this week is for us to follow Christ in becoming – individually and together – Immanuel in our broken world. The incarnation continues through Christians if we take Christ's call seriously!

LOCAL APPLICATION: It's not hard to discern, in our churches and communities, how the call to be agents of God's presence and love should be worked out. Within our own groups, it's the simple acts of service, inclusion and grace that easily manifest God's love. In this Advent season, a particular awareness of, and care for, those who have significant need is a visible reflection of God's care. Food parcels, invitations to be part of small groups and special community building events all open us, and those in need, to God's presence and love. Beyond the walls of the church, simple neighbourliness can be a very effective reflection of God's care. Setting aside time to volunteer in a shelter or caring ministry, or welcoming needy or lonely people into our celebrations – making them part of our family – also offers tremendous healing and transformation. Whatever the actual actions we may choose to do, the key to experiencing Immanuel again this Advent, is to offer ourselves to be "little Immanuels" in practical ways in our own world. If we can lay

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

aside any possible benefit we may receive – whether church growth or personal satisfaction – so much the better!

A WORD WITH THE CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE -

There is a beautiful hymn which has these words in it " Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine". Ask the children/young people if they can say why the words were written like that - "Love" came down - whose love? and why? If you have a printed order of service and have used the Advent wreath liturgy above, tell them that the answer is there...

God's love for us became visible in a person - when Jesus was born. Before that, people could only talk about God's love in an abstract way - but in Jesus that love could be seen and experienced. That's why the hymn says "Love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign." Show the cardboard cutout (*suggestion below*) and ask them if they know who it is supposed to be... hopefully they'll say 'Jesus'... turn the board over and show the word "Love" and say that Jesus didn't have to go around with the word written on his back (*like the cutout*) as God's love was so much a part of him that everything he did grew out of that love.

Christmas is that special time when we show our love for others in visible ways to people we know (ask how) and to people we don't even know - this is an opportunity to speak about the Christmas Bowl. Jesus, however, wants us to be loving and kind all year, not just at Christmas. As the last verse of the hymn says - "Love shall be our token" - that means that our love will remind people of God's love and Jesus' love, because we will do loving and caring deeds and speak loving and caring words as often as we possibly can.

Either sing "Love came down at Christmas" or sing "Away in a manger

On a piece of firm cardboard draw a picture of baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Cut around the picture and turn it over.

Print the word LOVE taking up as much of the space as possible. Fill background in with dark colour.

About 28cms (11 inches) long and 17 cms (6 1/2 inches at widest part) would suffice in most churches!

SERMON OUTLINE

Matt 1:18-23 She will give birth to a son

Imagine life in 1stC Nazareth - dirty little town - hard work, long hours, drudgery of peasant life - not easy...

1. The Pledge of M & J - to be married - they were betrothed - following engagement - legally binding commitment of 1 year - needed divorce to break it!

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

2. The Plight of M & J - a baby on the way - major crisis!

a) for Mary - what would Joseph think/say!! *he was a righteous man* - zealous for God & the ways of God - for truth & right... Would he believe that she was *with child thr the HSp?*

b) for Joseph -What would the neighbours think/say?? It was a time of inner turmoil for him too! > only solution - *he did not want to expose her to public disgrace* - the penalty for such unfaithfulness was death by stoning (Deut 22), so *he had in mind to divorce her quietly* by signing the necessary legal documents.. But he had other problems too - how would Mary & baby survive???

3. The Pleasure of M & J - from **CRISIS** to **CHRIST!** God takes a hand - *an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream*

a) the Work of the Spirit - *what is conceived in her is from the HSp* - the mighty miracle of the Virgin Birth - historic creeds...

b) the Work of the Saviour - *You are to give him the name "Jesus" for he shall save his people from their sins* - the **Mission of the Saviour** - the **Message of the Scriptures** - still being fulfilled in our generation & every generation - in all who turn to him in faith & trust/ believe in Him as Lord & Saviour... **1Tim 1.15: CJ came into the world to save sinners.**

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"God is with Us", the Rev Katerina Whitley, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2016/?cat=8>

"The Faith of Joseph," the Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/03/4-advent-a-2013/>

Three on the Matthew reading -

The Blind Leap, Rev. Daniel Matthews, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/2387-the-blind-leap>

"Believe in the Dreams of the Person You Love," the Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1070-believe-in-the-dreams-of-the-person-you-love>

"A New World Birth," the Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggemann, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/622-a-new-world-birthed>

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#),

Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown,

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-fourth-sunday-of-advent-december.html>

"Gathering Advent 2013," Fran Woodruff, *On The Chancel Steps*.
<http://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/gathering/>

The Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A -18th December 2016

[Living Love](#), Anna Shirey, *Anna's Hosannas*, Children's Lesson

<http://annashosannas.net/Advent-4A.php>

["Sermon of the Week,"](#) / ["Mensajes para niños,"](#) Sermons 4 Kids, Charles Kirkpatrick, Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Coloring Pages, Puzzles. Sermons4Kids.com.

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- 146* A great and mighty wonder
- 151* Child in the manger
- 160* Hark! the herald-angels sing
- 133* Long ago, prophets knew
- 168* Lord, you were rich beyond all splendour
- 135* O come, O come, Emmanuel
- 174* O little town of Bethlehem

It Came Upon The Midnight Clear
Love Came Down At Christmas
Let Earth And Heaven Combine
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
What Child Is This?
God With Us (Link to YouTube video)
Jesus Messiah (Link to YouTube video)
Born That We May Have Life
Joy Has Dawned
Light Of the World