

# The Hope of Heaven

## THE HOPE OF HEAVEN: THE HOPE OF OUR LIVES

### ADVENT WREATH

Jesus is the Hope of the World - Light first Candle

**Scripture Reading:** *"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," (Matthew 1:21).*

Jesus is the Hope of our Lives - Light second Candle

**Scripture Reading:** *"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'"(Matthew 1:23 NLT).*

Jesus comes into the world not only to save us. This week we learn that He is Immanuel, God is with us! I don't know about you, but whenever I hear the word Immanuel, especially during Christmas time, I think of the popular Christmas Carol - O Come O Come Emanuel! And I remember growing up always wondering why that song just really didn't sound too happy. In regards to music it has a somber and melancholy or moody vibe.

*O come, O come, Immanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.*

*Refrain:*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.*

As we dive into this morning's message, my prayer is we begin to get a clearer understanding of why this song is so significant and masterfully composed.

**OG QUESTION:** *When you think of the Christmas story, what do you think of? What does Christmas mean to you?*

When we picture the Christmas story, our mind may go to a beautiful star in the sky, dazzling white angels, or Magi dressed in fancy clothing. But the actual story of Christmas was anything but beautiful or pleasant. The first three years of Joseph and Mary's lives were, in a word, traumatic. And no surprise, for many people right now, the Christmas season is not necessarily a very joyful time. Actually many families right now in our congregation are experience or have recently experienced great adversity or even at times tragedy. Raise your hand if you ever felt like your world is coming undone and nothing seems to be going right. At time maybe you even felt hopeless.

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**OG QUESTION:** *Share a time when you felt hopeless and faced tragedy. In those times what thoughts were you processing? In what ways did you question where God was in those moments?*

This makes you ask the question, "Where is God in our hopelessness?" Christmas is a story of hope but maybe not in the way we might think.

Last week we read the birth of Jesus and learned his very name means JESUS SAVES. This week, we will look at what happens after the birth of Jesus. Most Christmas plays talk about the Magi who traveled from afar to bring gifts to the new born king. But, It's not often we hear about happens after that. Herod realizes he was outwitted by the wise men and he orders all the boys in Bethlehem 2 years and younger to be murdered (approximately 25-50 baby boys). This is where we pick up the story this week.

## The Escape to Egypt

<sup>13</sup> *"After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."* <sup>14</sup> *That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother,* <sup>15</sup> *and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."* <sup>16</sup> *Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance, (Matthew 2:13-16).*

If you were Joseph, the first thing you probably would have thought is where is God in all of this. The angle of the Lord appeared to tell me my woman is having a child and I haven't even been intimate with her - not so good news. And now the Angel of the Lord is telling me to run for my Child's life - more not so good news.

Think of it from Mary's perspective. She already went through the drama of getting pregnant before she was actually married and oh by the way it's the Holy Spirit who got her pregnant no she receives this news and you are having to be on the run fleeing on a donkey with baby in arms through the desert to escape from Herod. What should have been the most blessed time for her became the most horrific time.

We continue to read the story in Matthew...

<sup>17</sup> *"Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:*

<sup>18</sup> *"A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead," (Matthew 2:17-18).*

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As Matthew connects the new testament to the old testament prophecies, he is trying to show us that despite this horrendous evil we face in this world God is Immanuel - the God who is with us! We still have Hope.

Matthew 2:18 connects to Jeremiah 31:15 which predates Jesus by 600 years. The most tragic thing that happen was people of Israel were exiled and held in captivity by Assyrians in Babylon. Jeremiah sees it coming and then the rest of the book of Jeremiah is basically him grieving and mourning because of the state of God's people in captivity.

*"<sup>15</sup> This is what the Lord says: "A cry is heard in Ramah— deep anguish and bitter weeping. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted— for her children are gone,"*  
(Jeremiah 31:15 NLT).

This is were it gets interesting...

*<sup>16</sup> "But now this is what the Lord says: "Do not weep any longer, for I will reward you," says the Lord. "Your children will come back to you from the distant land of the enemy. <sup>17</sup> There is hope for your future," says the Lord. "Your children will come again to their own land,"*  
(Jeremiah 31:16-17 NLT).

So who is Rachael and why is she in anguish? Rachael was the matriarch of Israel married to Jacob the father of the sons who made up the 12 tribes of Israel. Her story has a tragic ending as well. For time purposes I won't go through the story this morning. But, you can find the story of how she dies in Genesis 35:16-18. Basically she dies while giving birth to her last child. She was Jacob's favorite wife and her passing caused him terrible grief. I'm sure at that time he was asking that famous question as well.. God where are you?

Examples: Mother's misscariage. Child loosing a parent. A Parent Loosing an older child. Personal testimony about Vivian.

**OG QUESTIONS:** *How can we encourage one another with the Hope of Heaven, Immanuel, in times of tribulation and tragedy? Is anyone in the group facing hardship right now? Stop and take time to pray for them.*

What's Matthew doing by connecting all the dots of tragedy and struggle and evil in this world? More importantly what does all this have to do with Christmas? In Short he's answering that famous question, God where are you?

The Answer: I am with you - Immanuel which literally means God with us!

God is speaking through Matthew and his profits that He grieves and He mourns the tragedy of humanity. He wants us to know he is not absent but rather he is grieving with us. However, when the time is right, He wants us to stop our grieving and focus on the Hope of Heaven -



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JESUS! Put our Hope in the resurrection power of Jesus to comfort us in our grieving with the knowledge of a better future.

We struggle with this reality because many of us come to the Lord thinking everything will be a bed of roses. We think He is going to fulfill all of our wildest dreams. But the truth is he doesn't promise us a problem free life.

He doesn't author the evil of this world. Unfortunately, because of our free will, He allows us to create hell on earth. It's not because God is bad but because we are bad. The whole point of the biblical story is how God takes our bad and creates something beautiful!

***OG QUESTION: What were your expectations when you first came to Christ? What are you expectations of what the Christian life looks like right now? How can seeing Jesus as the suffering servant help you in times of struggle?***

This is why Jesus is often referred to as the suffering servant. Immanuel, God is with us in the person of Jesus; every part of his life was marked with human disappointment. The only HOPE is that this suffering servant will bring healing through his life, death and resurrection.

O come, O come, Immanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Refrain:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

This Christmas we celebrate that the Son of God has now appeared. And through this son, God has now come to be with us through everything to give us a hope of redemption. This is why we can REJOICE! Because Immanuel shall come to each of us if we open our lives for Him to enter in.