

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church  
Fourth Sunday in Advent**

**Text: John 1: 19-28**

**Theme: Finally an *Immanuel* you can live with**

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***The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers - it is to him you shall listen just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more lest I die. (Deut. 18: 15-16)***

***The Lord is at hand, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made know to God. (Phil. 4: 4-5)***

***He confessed . . . "I am not the Christ." And they asked him . . . "are you the prophet?" And he answered "No". So they asked him: "Who are you?" . . . He said, "I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1: 20, 22-23)***

Part of the Christmas story from John's Gospel are the lofty and mysterious words that the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Nevertheless, as John pointed out also, He was in the world but the world knew Him not, and moreover, His own people did not receive Him. (John 1: 1-11, 14) The incarnation of our Lord that we shall celebrate again this Christmas was, however not the first time that God chose to show up here in His creation in a very direct and amazing fashion. We sing of the first *Noel* (*Noel* the French word for Christmas), but it certainly was not the first *Immanuel* (*Immanuel*, the Hebrew word for God with us) for the people of God. It was Moses who in his sermon preparing the children of Israel to enter the promised land alluded in our text to what we might call the first *Immanuel* at Mt. Horeb (i.e. Mt. Sinai). - For the people of God it was neither a pleasant nor a joyous occasion. What we might call the *First Immanuel* was when Moses assembled the Israelites at the foot of the mountain where God personally descended to them amidst smoke and fire. And, prior to carving them in stone, He thundered out the Ten Commandments personally to a terrified nation. Afterwards, as recalled in our Old Testament Lesson, the people told Moses they needed a mediator between themselves and God. They told Moses we will listen to you, but not directly to God any more lest we die. (Exodus 20: 18-21) In this context, Moses promised that God would raise up a prophet who would be like himself; that is, he would be a mediator between God and His people.

In our Gospel, quiz time for John the Baptist is reported as representatives of the Jewish religious establishment seek to inquire about his self-understanding and his odd ministry of baptizing in the wilderness. In direct response to questioning, no he is not

the great prophet that Moses promised; no he is not the Messiah, the Christ; no he is not the prophet Elijah risen from the grave. Rather, He is the voice in the wilderness, spoken of by the prophet Isaiah who is preparing God's people for the arrival of the Lord - that is, Immanuel. Yes, God again is planning on visiting his people. And yet as our lessons would allude, the second Immanuel will also bring us the great Mediator prophet that Moses promised in our Old Testament lesson. And to this we may add the words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians: the Lord is at hand and with this One we may approach him with our requests to God without having to be anxious, as they were in the Days of Moses.

The ministry of John calling for repentance requires also a new understanding that is so very important to receive this One who is coming in the Name of the Lord. All occasions of Immanuel - God with us - are not alike. Nevertheless, several things are typical when ordinary people acquainted with Old Testament history think about meeting up with the true God. Unfortunately, none of them would apply to the Immanuel, named Jesus. Indeed, all of them make it hard to accept that a real repeat Immanuel would be like the Christmas stories in Matthew, Luke or John. The first thing that would be typical of us sinful human beings is a feeling of fear and dread that may well attend the thought of a face-to-face meeting with the Creator of the Universe. If Moses was not able to look upon the face of God and live; were God to show up personally among us, how could we expect to fare any better? Secondly, if God opened his mouth and spoke directly to us, why should we expect the experience to be any different from the fear and anxiety of the Israelites when God thundered down Mt. Horeb to deliver his direct address? And thirdly, if God were to bring us an expression of His will by which we might receive His favor, why should we think that the second address would be more promising than the first one? In that first address when he delivered the Commandments of His holy Law, He told the Israelites, *do this and you shall live*. And, moreover, He told them that His Law was not to be added to or subtracted from.

How good it is that the Baptist has come to us at the end of this Advent season to prepare our hearts and minds for the arrival of just such a One that here in our lessons is being foretold and proclaimed. Yes, it will be another day of the Lord, another Immanuel - God personally coming to us again. This the Baptist tells us is at hand. However, unlike the first Immanuel, do not expect fire or smoke or thunder. Moreover, do not expect another presentation of the Law from the Lord descending a mountain. Rather look for One who, like Moses, comes as a mediator in flesh and blood - one that, as the Baptist intimates, you probably could not pick out of a crowd in your midst. Yet, this is not to be simply a tamer version of what God did and delivered during the days of Moses on the mountain. Yes, the Law was given through Moses, but in this approaching Christmastide, it is grace and truth that shall come to us from this prophetic Mediator who is Jesus, the Christ.

In coming of the promised Messiah, God comes to tabernacle with us His people

in the flesh of the man, Jesus. As Paul confesses, here in man Jesus we indeed have Immanuel - here *the fullness of God dwells bodily* (Col. 2:9). To receive this one is as easy on the emotions as beholding or indeed, just ask Mary, as holding a baby. To be ready to receive this one is to be ready to receive the Suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecy who is not much to look at but who will be the mediator who will take our place and in the full presence of God, make atonement for all our sins and those of the whole world. He will be that singular High Priest who will be our advocate before God as our champion who fulfills the Law given by Moses in our stead. Who becomes the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and by whose death, we live and enjoy God's favor.

To receive this one, does not require great courage to confront the majestic full face of God in all His glory. It does not require a life of holy living in accord with the provisions of the Commandments of his Law. It does not require that you find someone else in better favor who can bring your cares and petitions for a favorable review by your Creator. What it does require is that you clean out your heart through repentance and make room for the One who comes by the Name of the Jesus as the Immanuel who comes to save you from your sins and restore our life with a righteousness that is of his making - a righteousness that brings a reign of grace and truth in your life that replaces the slavery of the Law. This is a repentance that establishes a peace with God that is of His making, not our own. It is an acceptability for you that is of his making, not yours. Such repentance is how *you make straight the way of the Lord* who will be coming to you as the baby in the barn in Bethlehem, coming to you as the Immanuel that you can meet with calm anticipation and you can live relaxed with Him by His grace forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.