

Worth the Waiting!

Advent 4A

Text: Matthew 1:18–25

December 19, 2010

God Is with Us

In his book, *The Greatest Generation*, Tom Brokaw tells the story of Mary Wilson.

By looking at her, you would never guess this modest woman was the recipient of the Silver Star and bore the nickname *The Angel of Anzio*.

She earned the nickname at the beachhead in Anzio, Italy during World War II.

When the Allies got bogged down, they attempted an amphibious landing to turn the tables and gain the advantage in the battle.

Unfortunately, the Allied Forces got pinned down at the landing site and were dangerously close to being driven back into the ocean. It looked like another Dunkirk—another disaster—in the making.

Wilson was the head of the 51 army nurses who went ashore at Anzio.

They were at the scene of the battle to assist the doctors and medics tending the wounded.

Things got so bad that bullets were ripping through the tent where she was assisting doctors in surgery.

As the situation continued to deteriorate, arrangements were made to evacuate all of the nurses and get them out of harm's way.

But Wilson refused to leave in spite of the peril.

As she related her story years later, she said,
*How could I possibly leave them,
I was a part of them.*¹

In today's gospel, we hear the glorious good news that God is sending us a messiah, an anointed one, to deliver us through the most perilous times of life.

Using the imagery of the prophet Isaiah,

Matthew is bold to proclaim that Jesus is *Emmanuel*, i.e. *God with us*.

Jesus is a part of us; Jesus is God in our midst.

In calling Jesus *Emmanuel*,

Matthew is proclaiming that God is becoming a part of us staying with us and tending to us on the battlefields of life.

Our God is a good God.

He does not desert us in our hour of need.

He is a God who hears the cries of his people.

He hears the cries of Israel...He hears the cries of the church.

He hears our cries as we struggle with the forces of evil that bind us up and weigh us down.

Jesus, *our Emmanuel*, is the very presence of God with us.

He is God's assurance that God will never abandon us no matter how perilous the dangers we face may be.

A teacher who was assigned to tutor children in a large city hospital
was asked to help a particular youngster with his homework.
The boy's regular teacher at school told her,
*We're studying nouns and verbs in class,
and I'd be grateful if you'd tutor him
so he doesn't fall
too far behind.*

The visiting teacher went to the hospital to work with the youngster,
but when she got there, she was horrified to discover that
the boy was in the critical care unit.
He had been burned so badly all over his body that he could barely talk.
She tried to work with him on his nouns and verbs,
but the boy said virtually nothing.

When the teacher left to go home,
she was distraught and felt like
she had really failed.
But the next morning when she came back,
the head nurse asked her
what she had done with the young boy.

*We'd been worried about him, the nurse told the teacher.
But ever since you were here,
his attitude has changed.
He's fighting back,
and he's beginning to respond to treatment.
We believe he's going to live after all!*

The teacher was dumbfounded.
She had no idea what she'd done to
cause such a drastic change in the boy.
Some weeks later, after he had been released from the hospital,
the boy explained why the teacher's visit
had made such a difference.

It was a simple realization
that came to him that night
after the teacher had left.
He said with tears in his eyes,
*They wouldn't send a teacher
to work on nouns and verbs with a dying boy, would they?²*

The good news of the gospel is the assurance that
God never gives up on us,
and Jesus, *our Emmanuel*, is the
sign and seal of that assurance.
God comes to us in flesh and blood in Jesus
so that we can see
how much he loves us.

Sadly, while many people today believe in God,
what they believe about God
is not what the Bible teaches us about God.

What many believe is a modified form of *Deism*.

They believe God made the world, but they have no concept that
God continues to be engaged with the world.

For many people,
God only hovers
on the edges of life.

The Biblical revelation is quite different.

The Bible reveals a God who in fact enters into human history,
redeeming his *Chosen people*, the Israelites, from slavery in Egypt.

Even more,
in Christ God comes in flesh and blood to the world and to our lives
to redeem us from our bondage to sin and death.

God is not far off from us;
God never gives up on us,
and God never abandons us.

The assurance of that good news
—the sign God gives us—
is Jesus, *our Emmanuel*,
God with us.



¹ ChristianGlobe Illustrations, Staff, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 2001, 0-000-0000-10, <http://www.sermons.com>, downloaded 11-18-10

² Norman Neaves, *Quit Searching for God and Let God Find You!*