

Worship Notes

Volume 1, Number 12 ♪ December 2006

THEME: God with Us

Emmanuel!

God is the almighty Creator of the universe; the Bible calls Him “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:15-16). And yet (wonder of wonders!) this infinite God has condescended to be *with us*. “God with us”—in the Hebrew “Emmanuel”—what a world of meaning is contained in that phrase. For in those words are summarized all that God has desired and planned for humanity. He has created us for communion with Himself; He wants our fellowship; He has always desired to be *with us*.

But we left Him—“all we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Is 53:6). Yet God in His love has still sought to restore us and to enable us to be with Him again. And so,

God has pursued man.
Deity has sought out humanity.
Absolute holiness has reached out to sinful people.
Almighty power has stooped in love to lift up helpless men and women.

The climax of this process occurred when all that God is fused with all that man

was meant to be in a single Person who Himself embodies *God with us*, and who therefore bears the name EMMANUEL: Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, when we wonder each year anew at the advent of God in human flesh.

Christmas is Emmanuel’s story—the story of “God with us”.

All that God is fused with all that man was meant to be in a single Person, who Himself embodies “God with us” in the most intimate way imaginable

I. GOD WITH US . . . IN THE BEGINNING

God was with us when He made us and breathed the breath of life into us. God was with us even when we turned away from Him in sinful rebellion. God was with us as He patiently prepared history for its pivotal event: the coming of His Son into the world.

II. GOD WITH US . . . IN THE YEARS OF PROMISE

In sharp distinction to the vengeful gods of other nations of the day, the one true God called the people of Israel to shine as lights to all other peoples to show that God is a merciful God, whose lovingkindness never fails, and who had promises to be with those who will seek Him. Indeed, Israel’s light shone

dimly at times, as they were often unfaithful witnesses. Yet God was always with them; He never forsook them. And through His prophet Isaiah He told of a Child to come, a Son; and no ordinary person at that, because He was to be born of a virgin, who would conceive and bring this one to life. God said this Child would Himself be called EMMANUEL: God with us.

III. GOD WITH US . . . IN THE CHILD OF BETHLEHEM

Isaiah wrote that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, and that His name would be called Emmanuel. But little did he realize the tremendous implications of what the Spirit of God led him to write. For, with the coming of Emmanuel, God came to be with us in a way no one could ever have imagined and in the most intimate way imaginable—He became one of us. Jesus Christ, our Emmanuel—God in the flesh, the Light of the world, the Sunrise from on High, the Son of God—entered this world as a tiny baby.

IV. GOD WITH US . . . IN THE LAMB OF CALVARY

Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, grew to manhood and manifested His deity through works of power and words of authority. But those who had no interest in God being with us, those who would banish God from their prideful presence, took Jesus Emmanuel and nailed Him to a cross. There Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the author of life, experienced humanity's greatest enemy: death. And in His death, He experienced an aspect of humanity He never had in His blameless life: He experienced *sin*, in all its fullness, as the sins of all mankind were laid upon Him to bear in their place. And thus the prophecies of Isaiah, filled

with such brilliant hope in chapters 7, 9 and 40 of his book, took on the far darker tone of the Suffering Servant account in chapter 53.

But God gloriously consummated His redeeming work in Christ by raising Him triumphantly from the grave. This risen and ascending Savior promised His disciples: "I am *with you* always" (Matt 28:20).

V. GOD WITH US . . . IN HIS GRACIOUS GIFT

Jesus Christ offers forgiveness, new life and eternal hope to all who will accept the free gift of salvation made possible by His atoning death on the cross. All those who avail themselves of this offer enter into God's family and enjoy a blessed relationship of love and fellowship with Him, as well as the promise of an eternity in His presence (John 17:20-24).

VI. GOD WITH US . . . IN HIS GLORIOUS REIGN

The final consummation of God's desire to be with us will take place in heaven, where we will "see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2) and dwell with Him forever. The glory of God will fill all in all (Rev 21:23), and we will ever be at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8).

The great victory cry of the new heavens and new earth will be, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3). God will finally and forever be WITH US, and all will be right.

(adapted from "Emmanuel! God with Us," a Christmas program script by Ron Man; see [here](#) for complete script)

PERSPECTIVES

on traditional Christmas Scripture texts

Matthew 2:1-2

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.””

As with all translations, there is no absolute one-to-one correspondence between words; and indeed with the word *proskunew* (translated “worship” in this verse and in verses 8 and 10), there is a range of possible translations according to the context. It doesn’t automatically mean “worship” every time it is used. In the New Testament (and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament) this word is used variously to refer to:

- 1) prostration in homage and entreaty before royalty or another person of influence (1 Sam 25:23; 2 Kings 4:36; Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; Mark 5:6)
- 2) institutional worship (John 4:20,22; 12:20; Acts 8:27; 24:11; Revelation 11:1)
- 3) false worship (of man, Satan, angels) (Matthew 4:8-9); Luke 4:7; Acts 7:43; 10:25; Revelation 9:20; 13:4,8,12,15; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:10,20; 20:4; 22:8)
- 4) true worship, which may or may not include physical prostration (which is the original sense of the word) (Matthew 4:10; 14:33; 28:9,17; Luke 4:8; 24:52; John 4:21,23,24; John 9:38; 1 Corinthians 14:25; Hebrews 1:6; 11:21; Revelation 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4,10; 22:9)

Proskunew in this verse (and also in verses 8 and 10) should probably be translated in Matthew 2:2,8,10 as “pay homage to.” There is no indication that the Magi (or Herod) recognized Jesus’ deity; rather it is clearly stated that they were coming to pay honor to a “King.” While Matthew certainly has the perspective of Christ’s deity, it seems to be reading back into the text to see full-fledged worship in this context. And in fact “pay homage” is the rendering in several translations, including Phillips, the New Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible. Some prominent New Testament scholars concur:

“ ‘Worship’ need not imply that the Magi recognized Jesus’ divinity; it may simply mean ‘do homage.’ Their own statement suggests homage paid royalty rather than the worship of Deity. But Matthew, having already told of the virginal conception, doubtless expected his readers to discern something more—viz., that the Magi ‘worshipped’ better than they knew” (Donald Carson, *Commentary on Matthew*, 86; see also 89).

“Although some English versions view this action as ‘worship’ (AV, RSV, NIV), the statement of the Magi in verse 2 suggests that the meaning is homage paid to royalty rather than the worship of deity (so Phillips, NEB; cf. 1 Sam 25:23; 2 Kings 4:36). Of course, Matthew’s opening chapter has pointed to Jesus’ divine sonship and the evangelist no doubt intended his readers to discern that this homage had a greater significance than the visitors from the East could have imagined. Their attitude to Jesus anticipated the submission of the nations to the risen Lord, which is the essence of discipleship according to Matthew 28:16–20. The immediate context in Matthew 2, however, does not demand that worship of Jesus as Son of God is yet in view” (David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, 84-5).

Luke 2:1-7

Most Christmas dramas and stories portray Mary as in labor as she and Joseph pull into Bethlehem. Yet Luke’s text clearly states that “while they were there, the time came for her to give birth”! This and other surprising and fascinating observations may be found in Kenneth E. Bailey’s article “The Manger and the Inn: The Cultural Background of Luke 2:7,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 4/2 (1980):201-217. A summary of Bailey’s findings may also be found [here](#).

QUOTABLES

Great Christmas Texts

“And now, with what words shall we praise the love of God? What thanks shall we give? He so loved us that for our sakes He, through whom time was made, was made in time; and He, older by eternity than the world itself, was younger in age than many of His servants in the world; He who made man, was made man; He was given existence by a mother whom He brought into existence; He was carried in the hands which He has formed; He cried like a babe in the manger in speechless infancy—this Word without whom human eloquence is speechless! . . . Let us in His presence try to realize the abasement that He in all His majesty accepted for our sakes.”

(Augustine)

“Man’s Maker was made man
 that the Bread might be hungry,
 the Fountain thirst,
 the Light sleep,
 the Way be tired from the journey;
 that Strength might be made weak,
 that Life might die.”

(Augustine)

WELCOME, ALL WONDERS

Welcome, all Wonders in one sight!
 Eternity shut in a span.
 Summer to winter, day in night,
 Heaven in earth, and God in man.
 Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth
 Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

To Thee, meek Majesty! soft King
 Of simple graces and sweet loves.
 Each of us his lamb will bring,
 Each his pair of silver doves;
 Till burnt at last in fire of Thy fair eyes,
 Ourselves become our own best sacrifice.

(Richard Crashaw [1613-49], “The Holy Nativity of Our Lord God: A Hymn Sung as by Shepherds”; there are many choral settings of this text)

THE BELLS OF CHRISTMAS

The bells of Christmas chime once more;
 The heavenly guest is at the door—
 He comes to earthly dwelling still
 With new year gifts of peace, good will.

This world, though wide and far outspread,
 Could scarcely find for you a bed;
 Your cradle was a manger stall,
 No pearl no silk no kingly hall.

Now let us go with quiet mind,
 The swaddled babe with shepherds find;
 To gaze on him who gladdens them,
 The loveliest flow’r of Jesse’s stem.

Oh join with me, in gladness sing,
 To keep our Christmas with our King,
 Until our song, from loving souls,
 Like rushing mighty water rolls!

O patriarchs’ Joy, O prophets’ Song,
 O Dayspring bright, awaited long;
 O son of Man, incarnate Word,
 Great David’s Son, great David’s Lord.

Come, Jesus, glorious heav’nly guest,
 And keep your Christmas in our breast;
 Then David’s harpstrings, hushed so long,
 Shall swell our jubilee of song.

(“Det Kimer Nu Til Julfest,” Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, 1817; Translator: Charles P. Krauth, 1867)

AN ANCIENT ADVENT PRAYER

O Radiant Dawn
 Splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
 Shine on those lost
 In the darkness of death!

BEFORE THE MARVEL OF THIS NIGHT

Before the marvel of this night
 Adoring, fold your wings and bow,
 Then tear the sky apart with light
 And with your news the world endow.
 Proclaim the birth of Christ and peace,
 That fear and death and sorrow cease:
 Sing peace, sing peace, sing gift of peace.

Awake the sleeping world with song,
 This is the day the Lord has made.
 Assemble here, celestial throng,
 In royal splendor come arrayed.
 Give earth a glimpse of heav'nly bliss,
 A teasing taste of what they miss:
 Sing bliss, sing bliss, sing endless bliss.

The love that we have always known,
 Our constant joy and endless light,
 Now to the loveless world be shown,
 Now break upon its deathly night.
 Into one song compress the love,
 That rules our universe above:
 Sing love, sing love, sing God is love.

(Jaroslav J. Vajda, from *Now the Joyful Celebration: Hymns, Carols, and Songs*, Morning Star Publishing Co., 1987; there is a choral setting by Carl Schalk published by Augsburg)

THOU WHO WAST RICH BEYOND ALL
SPLENDOUR

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
 All for love's sake becamest poor;
 Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
 Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
 Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
 All for love's sake becamest poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
 All for love's sake becamest Man;
 Stooping so low, but sinners raising
 Heavenward by Thine eternal plan.
 Thou who art God beyond all praising,
 All for love's sake becamest Man.

Thou who art love beyond all telling,
 Saviour and King, we worship thee.
 Emmanuel, within us dwelling,

Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.
 Thou who art love beyond all telling,
 Saviour and King, we worship Thee.

(Frank Houghton [1894-1972]; commonly sung as a carol to the traditional French tune "Quelle est cette odeur agréable?")

WHAT SWEETER MUSIC

What sweeter music can we bring
 Than a carol for to sing
 The birth of this our heav'nly king?
 Awake the voice! Awake the string;
 Dark and dull night fly hence away,
 And give the honour to this day,
 That sees December turn to May.

If we may ask the reason say:
 We see him come, and know him ours,
 Who with his sunshine and his showers,
 Turns all the patient ground to flowers.
 The darling of the world is come,
 And fit it is we find a room to welcome him.

The nobler part of all the house here is the heart.
 Which we will give him and bequeath
 This holly and this ivy wreath,
 To do him honour who's our king,
 And Lord of all this reveling.

(Robert Herrick [1591-1674]; among several choral settings is John Rutter's stunning version, published by Oxford)

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

Light looked down and beheld Darkness.
 "Thither will I go," said Light.
 Peace looked down and beheld War.
 "Thither will I go," said Peace.
 Love looked down and beheld Hatred.
 "Thither will I go," said Love.
 So came Light and shone.
 So came Peace and gave rest.
 So came Love and brought Life.

(Lawrence Housman [1865-1959])

SEE, AMID THE WINTER'S SNOW

See, amid the winter's snow,
 born for us on earth below;
 See, the gentle Lamb appears,
 promised from eternal years:
 Hail, O ever-blessed morn!
 Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
 Sing through all Jerusalem:
 'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'

Low within a manger lies
 He who built the starry skies;
 He who, throned in height sublime,
 Reigns above the cherubim:
 Hail, O ever-blessed morn . . .

Say, you humble shepherds,
 Say what's your joyful news today?
 Tell us why you left your sheep
 On the lonely mountain steep:
 Hail, O ever-blessed morn . . .

"As we watched at dead of night,
 All around us shone a light;
 Angels, singing peace on earth,
 Told us of a Saviour's birth."
 Hail, O ever-blessed morn . . .

Sacred infant, king most dear,
 What a tender love was here,
 Thus to come from highest bliss
 Down to such a world as this!
 Hail, O ever-blessed morn . . .

(E. Caswall [1814—1878]; sung to the tune "Humility by J. Goss")

That the great Angel-blinding light should shrink
 His blaze to shine in a poor shepherd's eye;
 That the unmeasur'd God so low should sinke,
 As Pris'ner in a few poor rags to lye,
 That from His Mother's breast He milke should drinke,
 Who feeds with Nectar Heaven's faire family,
 That a vile Manger His low bed should prove,
 Who in a Throne of stars Thunders above;
 That He whom the Sun serves, should faintly peepe
 through clouds of Infant Flesh!
 That He, the old Eternal Word should be a Child,

and weepe;
 That He who made the fire, should fear the cold,
 That Heaven's high Majesty His Court should keepe
 In a clay cottage, by each blast control'd;
 That Glorie's self should serve our Griefs and feares,
 And free Eternity submit to years,
 Let our overwhelming wonder be.

(Richard Crashaw [1613-49])

CHRISTMAS SONNET

The kings have come and gone; the shepherds,
 too;
 Now who is this still standing at the door?
 An old and careworn woman, tired and poor,
 So old she makes the stones themselves seem
 new.
 She carries something in her trembling hands,
 And, bending low, her eyes alit with joy,
 She lays it down beside the sleeping Boy.
 And then—a wonder happens! As she stands,
 The wrinkles disappear, her stance grows tall,
 Her head stands high; face radiant as the dawn,
 She looks at Mary, smiles—and then she's gone.
 A glance at what she's left tells Mary all—
 The ancient, withered apple makes it plain:
 Through Second Adam, Eve is born again.

(Brent Davis)

FROM NEW ZEALAND

Carol our Christmas,
 an upside-down Christmas;
 Snow is not falling
 and trees are not bare.
 Carol the summer,
 and welcome the Christ Child,
 Warm in our sunshine
 and sweetness of air.
 Sing of the gold
 and the green and the sparkle,
 Water and river
 and lure of the beach.
 Sing in the happiness
 of open spaces,
 Sing a nativity
 summer can reach.

GUEST ARTICLE

Ilse Shaffer, now a retired missionary living in the U.S., grew up in Berlin during WWII and wrote about Christmas 1944 in that city. How prone we are to look back at all the people in Nazi Germany as “the enemy” and never consider the plight of Christians there. (Note: The “Christmas Trees” she mentions was the ironic label given by Germans to the incendiary markers dropped by Allied planes to target an area for the bombers.)

Christmas 1944 in Berlin

Would there really be Christmas again? Was this the time to celebrate? Where did all the people live that one saw in the streets, the overcrowded streetcars and buses? (So many buildings were destroyed.) Our army in the east was defeated. The Russians were in East Prussia and the Allies were getting close to the western border. We could no longer trust our news, but we knew the end was not too far away.

And now Christmas was approaching, the celebration of the coming of the Prince of Peace; my heart was bitter toward God. What did it mean this Christmas message: “Peace on earth?” There was no peace. This was the sixth Christmas since the war began, and still no peace. Where was God in all the destruction, the dying, the bombing? We saw the first refugees from the east, pulling a little cart with their few possessions, walking in this cold winter, walking, walking, walking, telling us horror stories of murder and rapes by Russian soldiers. “Peace on Earth”??? What would the next months bring? The bombing had not stopped; it got worse, day and night, day and night.

There were no lights in the streets, not many goods on the shelves, only at night the sky was lit up by the “Christmas Tree” bright lights that came down from heaven. The U.S. bombers were coming. If those lights shone over us or near us, we knew we were the targets of their bombs. We better get ready for it. We had not seen any Christmas trees for sale; we had better forget about Christmas. Then, the last day before the holidays my father had found a big branch of a tree about three feet tall. We rejoiced. What shall we do with it? Cut it up, put it in a vase? I found a big flower pot, filled it with sand, cut off the lower branches which I fastened to the trunk to make it look like a tree. The main branch was not quite straight. So I took a walking stick from my father, stuck it in the sand in the flower pot and gave the branch more support. It looked more and more like a Christmas tree. The clear old ornaments were fastened to the branches. There was our Christmas tree!

I cannot remember any presents. My mother raised rabbits, at least one gave its life so we could enjoy meat, but the real Christmas to us was when we all walked to church and heard the Christmas story. How different it sounded this year. Mary and Joseph, tired and hungry, could not find a place to live—so many people’s homes were bombed, they could not find a place to live—*God understood*. The baby Jesus had no bed, slept in a manger—our soldiers had to sleep on the floor, on straw or hay. *God understood*. Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus had to leave in a hurry, fleeing Herod—whole families: we saw grandparents, mothers and children, fleeing from home—*God understood*. How close God was—*He* was rejected, poor, in danger. His suffering had begun with His birth. He was one of us. Peace, the peace of God, filled our hearts. Christmas took on new meaning—*He understood*.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[The Hymns and Carols of Christmas](#)

WORSHIP EVENTS



January 2-4, 2007
 Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church
 Fort Lauderdale, Florida
www.musicexplosion.org

(see Bob Burroughs' "[Monday Morning Email](#)" for a \$25 discount)

CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



January 25-27, 2007
 Calvin College
 Grand Rapids, Michigan
www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos

EUROPE WORSHIP LINK 2007 Conference

April 18-21, 2007 Malenovice, Czech Republic
 for more information please see ewl.shorturl.com
 or contact Ron Man at RMan@gemission.com

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Unity in Worship



WORSHIP NOTES is a free monthly online digest of reflections, views, news and reviews concerning biblical worship. It is produced by Ron Man as a publication of *Worship Resources*, a department of Greater Europe Mission devoted to “strengthening the body of Christ in the U.S., Europe and around the world by promoting the priority, understanding and practice of God-centered, Christ-exalting, Biblically-based worship.” To subscribe, please go to www.worr.org and click on “Worship Notes” at the top. There are many other free resources on the website also. To receive an issue of *WN* in Word document format, please email RMan@gemission.com.