

Christmas 2021  
Matthew 1:21-23

Immanuel, the Lord is with us

Ladies and gentlemen! Finally, it is Christmas 2021. The Advent is a time of waiting for the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. So we say that Advent is a Double Waiting of the Lord's season, a time of waiting for Jesus Christ through the past, present and future. I loved the Mennonite Advent observance when I was still in Canada. The lighting of the candles one by one seemed solemn and mysterious.

Through the words of today's message I want us to think together about what Jesus Christ came into the world for. I pray that through this message the Nativity of Jesus Christ will fill your hearts with full of joy and hope.

First of all, Jesus Christ came to be our Saviour. Look at verse 21 of today's message. "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." The Son of Jesus is the same to God The Father in heaven. He left his glorious heavenly throne to come to earth in human form. The Bible tells us that the purpose of Jesus Christ coming into the world was to save us from our sins.

The question that we must ask ourselves is, are we really sinners? As Mrs. Miwako said in her testimony several weeks ago, "How can a country girl from Miyazaki, who is pure like me and does no wrong to others, be a sinner? I wondered." It is a concept that Mrs. Miwako and many others, especially those of us who are more serious, find difficult to be aware of.

But Romans 3:10 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." The Bible says that from the moment we are born we have "original sin" and that no matter how good we are morally, there is no one who is righteous before God. It also says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death." The Bible tells us that death comes from sin. Even we who are here now will not be here in 50 or 100 years.

One day, when I was in the fifth grade, I looked up at the ceiling and thought. I wondered where and why I was born, what would happen to me when I died, where I would go. Have you ever had that experience? I'm sure everyone has had that experience at one time or another when they have been ill. Last month, Jakucho Setouchi, a famous

monk and novelist, passed away. Many of her fans had asked her about paradise before she died. In response to their questions, Mrs. Jakucho humorously said, "I don't deserved to go there, but if I meet you there, we will all meet together there." It seems that even for those devoted to religion, the question of what happens after death is an uncertain one. But what about us? Is Mrs. Jakucho alone who is wondering where she will go? Can we as Christians confess today with certainty that we will go to heaven when we die? In order to be able to make such a confession on the brink of death, we need to have a firm belief in our only Saviour, Jesus Christ. Why is that?

God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to solve man's sin problem and death problem. By believing in Jesus Christ, He gives us eternal life. This good news is the biggest thing that human beings should celebrate. I was an earnest sinner who never missed school even when I had a fever. The country girl is a pure sinner. A beautiful celebrity is a beautiful sinner. The president is a powerful sinner. The scientist who won the Nobel Prize is a sinner of genius. A clergyman is a holy sinner who does penance every day. We are all sinners before God and we will all die.

As sinners ourselves, we can never solve the problem of our sin, the issue of our death. We can only live in fear of death and be slaves to it for the rest of our lives. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy—that is, the devil— and those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God, came into the world in a human body for each of us who are slaves to death and fear death. Throughout his 33 years of public life, he experienced all the horrors of death that human beings face. Finally, He was crucified on the cross, and three days later He rose again as promised, freeing us from death. He passed us from death to life.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." For the last two years the whole of humanity has been facing death every day because of the Covid-19 disaster. Even the catching of a cold is enough to make us fear that we will die of Covid-19. Are we as Christians confident that if we believe in Jesus Christ we will not perish but have eternal life? If we die today, are we sure that we will go to heaven? It is a question of faith for each one of us. To be honest, I am still afraid of death. So every day I pray, "Jesus, help me." I pray that my faith will be strengthened. How about you?

Next, Jesus Christ came into the world to be with us, to be Immanuel. Look at Matthew 1:23. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel."—which means, "God with us."

I believed in Jesus when I was 13 years old and the Christmas message that year was about this Jesus of Immanuel. I was so happy and surprised that God had come into the world to be with us in human form. At that time I was really alone and lonely. My father used to abuse my mother, me and my sister almost every day. My sister was always late coming home because she was afraid of my father. My mother, whom I loved, was working as a hotel operator because of my father who moved from job to job. So when I came home from school, my mother would immediately prepare dinner, checked me out for a bit, and then rush off to work the night shift. I was frightened of my father's violence and I always felt alone. The "Immanuel grace" that I heard at this time, that Jesus was with me, naturally brought me to tears of gratitude.

From then on, I began to confess and believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. However, my environment did not change. My father was constantly violent. My marriage was also hard. After the divorce, when I was raising my children, I became weak in my faith and sometimes I wanted to let go of Jesus. But Immanuel Jesus did not let me go. These days, I am trying to find out if Jesus was really with me in the painful past. It took me a long time, and I am not perfect yet, but fortunately now I became to confess slowly that Jesus was with me in that difficult time.

How about you? Do you believe that Jesus Christ has been Immanuel to you in the past? If you have had painful experiences in the past, you may still be grieving because you are not sure that Jesus was really there at that time. I pray that with the help of the Holy Spirit, each of you will be able to look at your past with the eyes of faith and confess that Jesus was with you at that time.

Then, at the present time, is Jesus Christ Immanuel with you? He seems to be there in worship and in Bible study, but those of you who are going through a difficult time right now may be so overwhelmed by fear and loneliness that it doesn't seem to register that Jesus Christ is with you.

I was very surprised when I later found a mistake on university application form for Kenta. These days, perhaps because of the menopause, I panic when it happened. Sure enough, I couldn't stand or sit, I couldn't do my housework and I felt depressed. Even though I believe in Jesus, read the Bible, and listen to gospel songs, suddenly I am attacked in a panic. I feel sorry for myself, but once that gust of panic blows, I can't get

back on my feet. I just prayed, "Jesus, help me," dozens of times. But it wasn't a problem that could be solved quickly. At that time, I suffered for a week because I could not act quickly. But finally I got up the courage to rewrite the wrong part and send it to the university. After that, fortunately, the examination voucher arrived at home safely, and I was so relieved. I am really seeking Jesus' Immanuel grace every day. It is hard for me to live my daily life without Jesus' presence with me. So what does this Immanuel of Jesus mean to you?

In the summer of 2013, I was working at a supermarket called Joy Farm in New Westminster, Vancouver. One day while I was watching Cashier, all of a sudden a passenger car rammed through the telegraph pole of the supermarket. I was really surprised. Fortunately nobody was injured and the car driver was only crushed.

At that time, I saw an amazing scene. The driver, a middle-aged woman, was so astonished at her own failure and she huddled in the road waiting for the police to arrive. Just then, a woman came running up to her. She was hugging the driver's shoulder and trying to talk to her. "It's going to be all right. You're lucky nobody got hurt." She waited for a long time with her until the police arrived, and even informed them of the accident. This is still one of the most memorable and beautiful stories in Canada. I admire this good citizen who didn't blame the person who obviously made a mistake, but just stayed with her and was there for her.

Like this good citizen, there are many times when it would be helpful if we could just be there for the problems. But, ladies and gentlemen, we have Jesus with us in a more powerful way. John 14:16-18 says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.-the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor known him. But you know him for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you "

After His resurrection and ascending to the heaven, Jesus asked God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to us. And even now, in the year 2021, if we confess and believe in Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit will live with everyone. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, lives in our hearts.

Jesus is Immanuel in the past and the present. And He will be with us in the future. Of course, he will be with us in the near future and even after we die. The Bible says that when we die we will all stand before God the Father and be judged. Jesus Christ will be with us at this final moment. 1 John 2:1 says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the

Father in our defense- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

If we believe in the Righteous Jesus, He will be with us as our Advocate. He covers our sins and defends us so that we can have eternal life. Even if we die now, Jesus Christ will take our hands and escort us to heaven. And after that, we can live with Jesus Christ forever in heaven. This is a great hope.

Revelation 21:2-4 says, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

God has promised us a new land, a new heaven and a new Jerusalem through Jesus Christ. Here we will be with Jesus Christ forever. This grace of Immanuel is a grace that was, is and will be. Revelation 1:8 says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." I pray that we all will be blessed with the Immanuel Grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ this Christmas season.

Let's pray together.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you from our hearts that you sent Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. And also we thank you that you are always with us as a grace to believe in Jesus Christ. Please be with us, Jesus, especially for our brothers and sisters who are suffering from sickness and other problems, that this grace may bring them joy and thankfulness every day. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.