

the back page - Sheth LaRue, Senior MDiv.

In the opening chapter of the gospel of Matthew we meet Joseph dreaming (familiar story, different character). We're given some facts about the Mary/Joseph relationship - she, pregnant and he, committed - and then an angel appears in the man's dream. This angel makes a proclamation: don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife...she'll have a son and "you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21, NRSV).

The author then makes a comment, quoting Isaiah 7:14, "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel." The author transliterates and defines the Hebrew word עִמָּנוּאֵל for his readers: "...Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'"

We'll briefly skip forward to the closing chapter of the gospel of Matthew, where we find Jesus reiterating his Emmanuel-ness: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20, NRSV)

This Emmanuel-ness is significant for Jesus, as Douglas R.A. Hare points out: "In a remarkably succinct way the full significance of Jesus' life and work is caught in this functional definition of who Jesus is."<sup>1</sup> Jesus' Emmanuel-ness isn't merely something that he is, it is something that he does - this 'God with us' is part of the bigger Divine salvific plan. The Emmanuel is at the start of the gospel and is at the end of it as well.

Why would Matthew bookend the gospel with the Emmanuel, the 'God is with us'? From the very beginning of his life Jesus was the embodiment of God with creation - God was with us through Jesus. But the Emmanuel didn't stop being the Emmanuel when he ascended. Look at the verbs in both passages: is/am - God didn't stop being with us! God is with us even now, some 2000 years after the proclamations of Emmanuel.

God is with us means that we will never be separated from God's love. No matter what we have done - or are doing - God is still there, still present, still with us.

God is with us means that we can do great things! If we claim and own that the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer is with us, then we can be assured that God's will is going to be accomplished and we're invited to be a part of that work.

God is with us means that in moments of fear, worry, and dissatisfaction, we know that we are not alone. God's on-going presence can bring us peace which will surpass all our understanding (Phil. 4:7) amid the struggles of life.

As we wind down our semester and continue to look forward to the holidays, may we be grounded by our understanding and knowledge of what Jesus does for us. When we hear the liturgist's proclamation: 'The Lord be with you', may we find rest in those words and respond with trust. The Emmanuel mourns with us, rejoices with us, walks with us, speaks with us, laughs with us, eats with us...God is with us! That is good news!

<sup>1</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 12.