

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 3, Title: The Mystery of Immanuel

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him 'Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us' " (Matthew 1:23). "He appeared in a body . . . believed on in the world" (1 Timothy 3:16). In lesson 2 we got our first glimpse of Jesus as the Babe in Bethlehem. Mary, His blessed mother, gave Him a human body. Thus He became a member of the human family, and later He called Himself "the Son of man" (Matthew 16:13). This is known as the "incarnation." Jesus had no earthly father. The God of heaven was His father. In this lesson we will see if we can understand a little better what the Bible means when it refers to Jesus as "the Son of God" or as "Immanuel . . . God with us." Our study will take us back before the birth of Christ in Bethlehem to the time when the Son lived in heaven with His Father. This will be an intensely interesting and revealing study, but there are some other important things that you need to think about first.

Whenever we think of God the Father, a question arises in our minds concerning His nature and character. What is God like? When we were children, we tried to conjure up in our mind's mental pictures of Him. Curiosity tried to penetrate the unseen and the unknown. And it is important for all of us to know for ourselves the answer to the question: What is God like? How can we worship Him intelligently unless we appreciate Him for what He really is? Too many people think of God as some sort of policeman of the world, a supreme spy, a stern judge, or perhaps an exacting schoolmaster. These ideas about God fall far short of the truth. One way to understand and appreciate God would be to go to heaven and see Him and talk with Him. But since we do not have that privilege, at least for now, we may become acquainted with Him through the revelation given to us by Jesus Christ. God has been revealed in human flesh by One who is God's Son, and because of this we can understand something of the nature and character of the Father. The life of Christ shows that the Supreme Being is the kind of God that humans want to worship. Let's come back to our theme now, and turn to the Bible for light on this great truth.

HOW WAS CHRIST'S DIVINE SONSHIP ANNOUNCED? Before the birth of Jesus, an angel announced to the virgin Mary that the Son to be born to her was the Son of God. "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,'... The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God' " (Luke 1:30-32, 35).

The heavenly messenger made it clear to Mary that she was to become a mother and that God Himself was to be the Father of the holy child. Here are the angel's words—"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). When Jesus was born, the Father recognized the appearance of His Son in human flesh by sending an angel choir to sing the thrilling announcement. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:14, 11). Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 3, Title: The Mystery of Immanuel Section 2 with the title: Who Is The Supreme Revelation Of God To Men?

Throughout the New Testament the coming of Jesus to this earth is hailed as the supreme revelation of God to human beings. The incarnation of Christ has been said to be the most stupendous fact in the history of the world, and in it we have God's answer to our desire to see God and know Him. The apostle John refers to Christ as the eternal Word and says that he became flesh. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14). And again the apostle writes: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Paul tells us that the coming of Christ to this earth in human form was a manifestation of God to men: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). God is revealed to humanity through His Son, One who is of the same divine nature as God but who appeared on earth as a man in human flesh. To know Christ, the Son of God, is to know God the Father, for Jesus is God and reveals the Father perfectly.

One evening after Dr William Spurgeon of Wales had delivered a lecture, a kindly old gentleman approached him and said, "Dr. Spurgeon, I am glad to meet you. I am the father of Henry Drummond." "Oh, then," said Spurgeon, "I already know you, for I know your son so well." Even so, God the Father has been revealed to human beings by His Son. Jesus Himself said to Philip: "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:7, 9). So, Immanuel,—"God with us"—means that God's Son lived with us in our world. What an amazing thought it is that God should have "appeared in a body" and be "believed on in the world" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Did Christ Dwell With The Father Before Coming To This Earth? In one of the prayers that Christ offered while here on earth, He revealed that He had been with God the Father from eternity: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:5, 24). You see, Christ was with the Father "before the creation of the world." He was with the Father "before the world began." Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the prophet Isaiah had said that God's Son lived and that He would come to this earth as a child: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Christ shares with His Father the divine nature. God the Father refers to Christ as "the man who is close to me" (Zechariah 13:7), that is, His equal, His associate. His "origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2). About the Son, God the Father says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (Hebrews 1:8).

While Jesus was on earth, He demonstrated His relationship to the Father by His Godlike attributes and unselfish service. In this way He sought to attract people to true worship. "For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36). As you become better acquainted with Christ, you will discover that one great purpose of His coming to earth was to reveal God the Father and to show that He is just as worthy of your love as is Jesus, because His love is the same. "He [Jesus] gives me my clearest picture of God, for in him I find united those

qualities for which my heart cries out in ultimate reality—supreme love, perfect righteousness, and above all an unwearying patience that no disappointment can discourage and no failure dismay" (Treasury of the Christian Faith, page 89). Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 3, Title: The Mystery of Immanuel Section 3 Who Led Israel In Old Testament Times?

The facts we have mentioned reveal that Christ must have lived in Old Testament times just as certainly as in New Testament times. We see Him all through the Bible. Paul says that He was the "spiritual rock" that followed, or accompanied, the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt: "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Christ personally guided the nation of Israel during the exodus from Egyptian slavery in about 1500 B.C. and while the Israelites were wandering in the desert wilderness. The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud that guided Israel during the long journey (see Exodus 13:21, 22), represented the presence of Him who said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). The water that flowed from the rock was a symbol of Christ, who is the Water of life (see Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11; John 4:14). The manna that Israel ate for forty years in the wilderness wanderings was given to remind the people of the Lifegiver, who said: "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:32, 33, 51).

Jesus spoke publicly to the Jews of His existence prior to Abraham, the founder of the nation of Israel about 2000 B.C. He declared: " 'Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it, and was glad.' 'You are not yet fifty years old,' the Jews said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!' 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' " (John 8:56-58). Here Christ used the name by which He had revealed Himself to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This means that Jesus lives always—not only "yesterday and today," but "yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He is a present help in time of need. He is the eternal "I AM." So, you see, Christ lives in all the Bible—in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

Did you ever see one of those puzzle pictures on which you were told to discover the face of a man or some object? You turned it this way and that, and finally, there you suddenly saw it, just as plain as day, and wondered why you had not seen it before! The great face in the Bible is that of Jesus. He is the supreme object of the Scriptures. He said, "Diligently study the Scriptures. . . . These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). "Like the scarlet thread that runs through every inch of rope in the British navy, like the melody of a beautiful song, like the theme of a great masterpiece—so is Jesus in the Scriptures. He is the author and the hero, the beginning and the ending of your Holy Bible" (Bible Readings for the Home, page 35).

CHRIST'S COMING WAS FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS: David, the king of Israel, who lived in the eleventh century B.C., was a prophet of God. By inspiration he wrote of Christ's promise to come to this earth: "Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart' " (Psalm 40:7, 8). The coming of the Son of God in the flesh was the central theme of all the Old Testament prophets, for example: " 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. . . . This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our

Righteousness' "(Jeremiah 23:5, 6; see also Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 6:12; Malachi 3:1).

During the Old Testament times, the faithful children of God lived in continual expectation of Christ's coming. The prophet Haggai calls him "the desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7), and we can add—of all ages. His coming had been the one hope to which the people of God had clung for redemption from evil, for a way of escape from the bondage of sin. The Son of God had said, "I come" (see Psalm 40:7). And He did come—voluntarily! After many centuries of hope and expectation, "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). Bethlehem testifies to the coming of Christ to our world in human flesh. "Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:5-7). Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 3, Title: The Mystery of Immanuel Section 4 How Does Christ Unite God And Man?

During His ministry in this world, Jesus revealed His great purpose to reconcile men and women to God. He came to earth to bring human beings and God into a father-son relationship—a daughter-father relationship. He was set apart to be our Savior. "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:19, 21). Sin has separated humanity from God. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). But through Christ, the Father is able to bring His wandering children back into fellowship with Himself. "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear." (Isaiah 59:1).

Jacob's ladder (see Genesis 28:10-12) represents the bridge Jesus made over of the gulf caused by sin. When Christ left the realms of glory to become a man and die on the cross for our sins, He spanned the gulf between earth and heaven, between humanity and divinity. He Himself is the ladder between humanity and God, bringing us up to God and God down to us (see John 1:51). Upon Him, we may climb to the highest heaven! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him (see John 14:6). But all may come to him and be saved. "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 God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16, 17).

HOW MAY WE RELATE OURSELVES TO THE SON OF GOD? Peter expressed the faith of Christ's disciples when with deep feeling and he said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Ethiopian eunuch revealed his faith in Christ when he exclaimed: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37, margin). This Ethiopian's words represent the faith of millions of Christians down through the centuries who have believed in the divine sonship of Jesus. Read Acts 8:37 prayerfully. If you can say the last ten words of that verse sincerely, you have taken the first important step in the Christian life. You have placed your feet on the ladder that connects earth and heaven. Here are a few simple facts of Christian faith that will be developed in future lessons and that will help you to see how belief in Christ as God's Son—Immanuel, "God with us"—may affect your life.

1. The advent of God's Son in the flesh testifies that God may dwell in humanity.
2. Christ's crystal pure life, "holy, blameless, pure" (Hebrews 7:26), makes possible to all of us the strength of God in our struggle with sin.
3. His sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection offer hope of victory over death and the grave.
4. His ascension to heaven at the close of His earthly ministry restored Him to the side of His Father, where He now serves as our Advocate (see Hebrews 9:24; 1 John 2:1).
5. He now represents us before God. We have an Intercessor in heaven who understands humanity, for He is one of us. He also understands God, for He is one with the Father.

This divine-human Christ is our Savior and Friend. To believe in Him is to be accepted by the Father. To accept Him as Lord and Savior is to place our feet upon the path that leads to peace here—and to eternal life hereafter. As the light of Christ's beautiful life shines upon your pathway, you can say, "He is truly the Light of my life and the Light of the whole world." Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).