



Emmanuel

("God with Us")

Henry M. Morris

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Institute for Creation Research

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P.O. Box 52029, Dallas, Texas 75229

1806 Royal Lane, Dallas, Texas 75229

Phone: 214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

www.icr.org

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Dr. Henry M. Morris was Founder and President Emeritus of the Institute for Creation Research.

“And now, little children,
abide in Him; that, when
He shall appear, we may
have confidence, and not
be ashamed before Him at
His coming” (1 John 2:28).

Emmanuel (“God with Us”)

One of the most familiar passages in the Bible—familiar because of its frequent appearance on Christmas cards and in Christmas sermons—is also one of the most profound and mysterious passages in the Bible. I am referring to Isaiah 9:6.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

The mystery is how a mere child, born like other children, could also be “The everlasting Father.” The very terms seem to constitute, in the modern jargon, an “oxymoron”—that is, an impossible contradiction in terms.

The same problem is encountered in that other very familiar Christmas verse, Micah 5:2:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

That is, how could a Babe be “brought forth” (note verse 3) from a mother in Bethlehem when He had already been “going forth” from everlasting?

Then, consider also the great prophecy of the virgin birth, “which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet [that is, in Isaiah 7:14] saying,” as cited by the angel in Matthew 1:23:

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

God Himself—“with us”—in the guise of a virgin-born child! How can such things be?

God Himself had told Moses: “There shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). Similarly, the apostle Paul spoke of God as “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (I Timothy 6:16).

Indeed the very concept of an everlasting, omnipotent God who created the mighty universe seems impossible to grasp by mere mortals—especially by those astronomers and cosmologists (the modern-day counterparts of the “wise men from the east”) whose very careers are spent in studying the universe and trying to understand its origin and nature. Surveys have shown that only a very small percentage of scientists in these fields are active in any kind of church. Their very purpose in life seems to be to try to explain not only the evolution of the universe, but even its very origin, without God. The Big Bang theory, with its initial period of supposed “inflation,” increasingly involves the assumption (at least by those who think about

origins at all) that our universe simply evolved out of nothing, by means of a “quantum fluctuation in the primeval state of nothingness.”

Such explanations are considered by them to be preferable to believing that, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). While it is true that one cannot *prove* that God created, neither can anyone prove that the universe created itself. At least the concept of Almighty God as Creator presents a reasonable First Cause, able to account for the complex of myriad effects that comprise the cosmos, whereas the assumed primeval nothingness explains nothing! Creationists thus have a *reasonable faith*, based on good evidence, whereas cosmic evolutionists have a highly unreasonable *faith*, based on the omnipotence of “nothing.”

It may, indeed, be true that we cannot actually “see” God, for He is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (I Timothy 1:17). Christ Himself said that “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). And to those in this scientific age who stress that the scientific method requires “observability,” this may seem to be a problem.

But the fact is that God *has* been seen by men! Enoch and Noah both “walked with God” (Genesis 5:24; 6:9), and “the LORD appeared unto Abram” (Genesis 12:7; 17:1; 18:1), as well as Isaac (Genesis 26:2). Jacob testified: “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Genesis 32:30).

It was also said that Moses was a man “whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). During the period of the conquest and the judges, there were

occasions when “the angel of the LORD” appeared to men, and was recognized as the Lord Himself (note the case of Gideon and also that of the parents of Samson, for example; Judges 6:22; 13:21-22). The patriarch Job could say, after deliverance from his sufferings: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5).

Much later the great prophet Isaiah testified: “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isaiah 6:1). Ezekiel also saw that “upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. . . . This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ezekiel 1:26,28).

There were still other occasions recorded in the Old Testament when the Lord appeared to men, either in a vision or “face to face,” as well as even more times when He “spoke” audibly to men. As would be expected, numerous skeptics through the centuries have said this was one of the Bible's “contradictions.” In many places, they say, the Bible says that no man can see God, whereas in other places it says that many men did see God.

This superficial discrepancy, of course, is beautifully resolved in the wonderful truth of the Triune Godhead, and was specifically clarified by the Lord Jesus Christ, when He said:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 1:18).

That is, whenever the omnipresent, invisible God has deigned to appear to men, He has done so in the person of His

eternal Son, who is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15).

Since the Son is, indeed, “in the form of God . . . equal with God” (Philippians 2:6), He is omnipotent and can surely assume the form of an angel or a man or even a burning bush (note Exodus 3:2-6), when He so wills. Thus men have on occasion in the past actually seen God. It was not God in His essential triune glory, of course, but rather God declared and manifested as God the eternal Son, forever “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), yet eternally going forth (Micah 5:2) to manifest the Godhead.

All such appearances of God to men were what are called “theophanies,” or preincarnate appearances of Christ. The English word “theophany” is from two Greek words meaning “God appearing,” and it beautifully defines these many appearances of God the Son to men before He actually *became* man.

Now, however, He has become forever Emmanuel, “God with us!” He who was the very “brightness of [God's] glory, and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3), was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:8). He was one with “The mighty God” and “The everlasting Father” but has now become one with us, “made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) in order that He, as Emmanuel, might also become “JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He who had “created all things” (Ephesians 3:9) finally created a human body in which He Himself would dwell and in which He would then die for our sins and rise again for our justification.

The Word [that is, the creating Word!] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) (John 1:14).

His first-century disciples were thus privileged to see God “manifest in the flesh” and then “received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:16). We who live in the twenty-first century have not been given this particular privilege, although He does, even now, “abide” in us by His Spirit (note John 14:21-23; 15:15), an even greater privilege.

But we also shall see Him in the flesh one of these days, for He is still a true man, resurrected and glorified, forever the Son of man as well as God. Furthermore, “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (I John 3:2-3).

And when we finally see Him, it will be far more glorious than when John and Peter saw Him by the Sea of Galilee. The only place in the Bible where His physical appearance as Son of man is actually described is when John saw Him on the Isle of Patmos, many years later, after His resurrection and ascension. Here is how John saw Him, and this is how we shall see Him—not as a babe in a manger and not as our sin-bearing substitute nailed to a cross, but as our eternal King of kings and Lord of lords!

I saw . . . one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and

His eyes were as a flame of fire; And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in His strength (Revelation 1:12-16).

Then, when we, as His heavenly Bride, shall “see Him as He is,” we can say with thanksgiving, “This is my beloved, and this is my friend” (Song of Solomon 5:16).

Other Christmas Booklets of Interest

The Gifts of God
God's Only Begotten Son
Creation and the Virgin Birth
When God Became Man
His Son's Name
When They Saw the Star
Christmas: Pagan or Christian?
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