

December 22 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

What's in a Name?

By Michele Bisbey, CDP, PhD

“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” (Is 7:10–14)

These words from the prophet Isaiah are echoed in the Gospel text for this fourth Sunday of Advent (Mt 1:18–24), with a very significant addition: the interpretation of the Child's name, Emmanuel. The text makes it clear and explicit: Emmanuel means “God is with us.” This is more than etymology; it is concrete reality.

Hidden within that phrase is this essential truth: God, the all holy, the all-powerful, the all mighty, wanted to be “with us.” God chose to be “with us”; that is, to be one with us, part of our very being. And most stunning of all, we are invited to become the very life of God. Significantly, salvation is first revealed in Jesus' conception and birth. God's entry into time and history as human is our invitation to intimate friendship with God. To be human is to be offered divine life. Divinity, which was Jesus' by nature, is ours by gift. In sum, God became human that we might become God. (St. Athanasius, De inc. 54, 3: PG 25, 192B) This is the “glad tidings” of Christmas, not as a past event, but as a present reality! Emmanuel is present in you and in Me.

This text treatment from the St. John's Bible is a visual commentary on the Isaian text. It explodes with energy, color, and radiating gold. Blues, greens, and yellows suggest Marian connections, since devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mother finds part of its scriptural basis in Isaiah 7.

