Crossroads International Church Singapore Dr. Rick Griffith

16 December 2018 Message 1 of 3

NLT 50 Minutes

**Immanuel: God in Place**

Title

***Bethlehem in Scripture***

**Topic:** Place

**Subject:** Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?

**Complement:** God transforms our shame into honor.

**Purpose:** The listeners will experience God transforming their shame into honor by faith.

Subject

Left-Right

(9 slides)

Immanuel

(2 slides)

**Attribute:** We worship our Omnipresent God

**Reading:** Micah 5:1-4

**Song:** O Little town of Bethlehem

# Introduction

Familiarity Contempt

### Interest: It’s been said that *familiarity breeds contempt.* Wow, really? Does that apply to Christmas? After all, this is my 60th Christmas! Do you treat this season with contempt? We are familiar with the Christmas story but still can’t answer basic questions. Here are just a few:

• Bulb

#### What does *Immanuel* mean and how is this important?

#### What does *Bethlehem* mean and how is this important?

Map

#### Where is Bethlehem anyway? Can you tell on this map?

#### Why is Bethlehem a significant place for Jesus to be born?

### Well, to answer one of these questions, “Immanuel” means “God with us.” It comes from Matthew 1:23 [read].

### Curiosity: Our three-week series this month will seek to unpack the meaning of "Immanuel: God With Us” by answering these questions:

Series:   
God in…

#### God in Place is this week. Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? We will answer the “Where” question.

• Place

#### God in Time is next week. Why then? Why did Jesus come at the time he did? We will answer the “When” question.

• Time

#### God in Us is week 3. Why within? We will answer the “How” question to see how God works.

• Us

### Subject: Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? Why did God select Christ to be born in Bethlehem?

Subject

### Background: Bethlehem was a dishonored, obscure town in the obscure “right stage” of Israel.

Bread

(3 slides)

What it Means

#### Bethlehem means “house of bread.” What a fitting place for one to be born who said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry” (John 6:35).

#### Interestingly, the present name for Bethlehem in Arabic means “house of meat”! I can’t say I know why!

Meat

#### Bethlehem lay in the obscure hill country of Judah in what one teacher calls “right stage” Israel [explain next 8 slides].

### Preview: Today we will first see how God transformed Bethlehem and then how he transforms us.

### Texts: We will look at many passages.

(So why Bethlehem? What was God doing? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive?)

Jud 19-21

(11 slides)

Rachel

MP

Men Die

David & Saul

Transition

Moved

(5 slides)

MI

# I. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in David.

[The Lord turned this obscure town from shame to fame though David.]

## Bethlehem was a town of death and shame.

### Rachel died on the road to Bethlehem (Gen 35:19).

Jud 17-18

(10 slides)

### A Levite from Bethlehem served as a pagan priest (Judges 17–18).

### Bethlehem was the town of a concubine whose death almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19–21).

### Bethlehem was the town of Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion—all who died prematurely (Ruth 1:1-5).

## But God turned the obscure town of Bethlehem into a town of life and honor.

Theology   
of Ruth

### The theology of Judges-Ruth-Samuel show that, as Bethlehem prospered, so Gibeah declined. [Explain slide.]

### God honored Bethlehem with abundant crops as the “house of bread” during apostasy (Ruth 2).

Crops

### God honored Boaz and Ruth to parent David’s grandpa in Bethlehem (Ruth 4:17).

Obed

(2 slides)

### Bethlehem took an even higher status as King David’s hometown (1 Sam 16:1; 17:58).

### “Bethlehem was apparently also the home of David’s general, Joab, and his brothers Abishai and Asahel (2 Samuel 2:18, 32), as well as of Elhanan, one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:24)” (*Dictionary of Place Names*).

Mighty Men

# II. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in Jesus.

MPs

[The Lord turned this obscure town from shame to fame though Christ.]

## Micah prophesied for Bethlehem as Israel’s most honored town in Messiah’s birth (Micah 5:2).

Micah 5:2

### Bethlehem was considered one of the smallest towns of Judah.

### Yet God chose Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace.

Portal

## God fulfilled his promise with Bethlehem as the world’s portal for God to appear as a baby.

Still Tiny NT Town

### Of all places on earth for God to appear in the flesh, he chose the formerly despised Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4). In the NT, it still remained a tiny town!

### God moved people throughout the entire Roman Empire so the town of David would become the town of David’s far greater ancestor, Jesus (Luke 2:1).

(But how does the transformation of Bethlehem relate to us personally? Well, we have the same problem of shame that Bethlehem originally had but…)

# III. God transforms our shame into honor (Main Idea).

[The Lord takes our dishonor and turns it into honor when we trust him.]

## God is bigger than our humble backgrounds.

### He uses the insignificant places like Bethlehem to turn a shepherd into a king.

### He has honored the son of a social worker and salesman to represent him in Asia (that’s me).

## God is bigger than our failures.

### He transforms cities of shame to honor his name.

### The 12 divorces of my parents and those they married are overcome in my life by his grace.

## God chooses where we are to live.

### He gave us Eden and is preparing a new Eden for us.

### Acts 17:26, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”)

Subject

(Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?)

# Conclusion

### Main Points today remind us that…

MPI

#### God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in David.

#### God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in Jesus.

MPII

#### God transforms our shame into honor…

MI

### God transforms our shame into honor (Main Idea).

### God shows he is with us by transforming our place (Main Idea restated).

### Fuller MI: God With Us (Immanuel) means God moves us to his places (He planned Bethlehem as his entry place).

How?

• Faith

### Exhortation: But how does God do this? How does he turn shame to honor? He does so by our simple trust in him.

#### Joseph and Mary trusted God’s word that they would birth the first baby of a virgin.

#### Shepherds believed by faith what the angels said.

#### Wise men traveled a great distance, trusting that the star would show them God’s king—but more about that next week!

How his places?

### How is God moving you to his places?

#### Literally speaking, do you worship God for moving you to your new place?

#### Figuratively speaking, how does God want you to trust him to move you to a new place in your thinking about Jesus?

### Prayer

Prayer

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### The Roman Occupation

### “Bethlehem bears the modern name of Beit-Lahm, i.e., ‘house of flesh.’ It is about 5 miles south of Jerusalem, standing at an elevation of about 2,550 feet above the sea, thus 100 feet higher than Jerusalem” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

### There is a church still existing, built by Constantine the Great (A.D. 330), called the “Church of the Nativity,” over a grotto or cave called the “holy crypt,” and said to be the “stable” in which Jesus was born. This is perhaps the oldest existing Christian church in the world. Close to it is another grotto, where Jerome the Latin father is said to have spent thirty years of his life in translating the Scriptures into Latin. (See VERSION.) (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

### Eerdmans Bible Dictionary:

**BETHLEHEM** (Heb. *beît◊ lehΩem, beît◊ halahΩmiî;*

Gk. *Beäthleém*)

A city name originally derived from Heb. “*bayit◊,* “house,” denoting a cultic site, and the name of a pair of ancient Mesopotamian agricultural deities, Lahmu and Lahamu, listed early in the cosmogony of the *Enuma Elish.*

Traditional Shepherds’ Field at Bethlehem. In the distance is Tell Herodium (Allen C. Myers)

**1.** A village in the tribal territory of Zebulun (Josh. 19:15). It was likely the hometown of the judge Ibzan (Judg. 12:8, 10). The name survives in modern Beit LahΩm, 11 km. (7 mi.) NW of Nazareth.

**2.** Bethlehem of Judah, located 8 km. (5 mi.) SSW of Jerusalem, at an elevation of ca. 762 m. (2500 ft.), and just E of the Hebron road which runs along the ridge of the Judean hill country. The earliest mention of the city may be in the 14th-century b.c.e. Amarna Tablets (*ANET,* 489, n. 21) in which Jerusalem’s governor Abdi-heba suggests that Bit [p. 173] Lahmi (or *Bit-ilu Nin.urta*) has fallen into the hands of the marauding {Apiru people.

The origin of the city is unknown, and the site is first mentioned as Ephrath, and parenthetically Bethlehem, just north of which Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:19; 48:7). The city is not mentioned in the Hebrew text of the tribal allocation list for Judah in Josh. 15:1-63, though the LXX includes the city in the ninth district of Judah. Salma, a grandson of Caleb through Ephrath, is called the “father of Bethlehem” in 1 Chr. 2:51. Surface survey of a mound immediately to the east of the Church of the Nativity yielded Bronze and Iron Age remains, but no stratigraphic excavation has yet been carried out in the modern city.

Israelite inhabitants in Bethlehem are known from the time of the judges. Though the city was not allocated to the Levites, a young Levite from Bethlehem served as priest to Micah in the hill country of Ephraim (Judg. 17:7). It was the home of the concubine of an Ephraimite Levite whose slaughter precipitated civil war against the tribe of Benjamin, leading to the near annihilation of the tribe (Judg. 19-20). Bethlehem was home to Elimelech and Naomi, and here Ruth met Boaz, who as kinsman-redeemer purchased the field of her deceased husband. Hence Bethlehem was the hometown of David, their descendant through Obed and Jesse.

The city rose to prominence after Samuel anointed David as the second king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-13). The Philistines established a military outpost in Bethlehem in the days of Saul (2 Sam. 23:13-17) while David was assembling his band of warriors. Later Rehoboam fortified Bethlehem and 14 other Judahite cities as a defensive network around Jerusalem (2 Chr. 11:5-6). Listed among the returnees from Babylonian Exile under Zerubbabel are 123 men of Bethlehem (Ezra 2:21; Neh. 7:26 cites 188 combined from Bethlehem and Netophah).

Micah’s prophecy concerning the messianic king (Mic. 5:2[MT 1]) was familiar to the religious leaders of Jerusalem whom Herod summoned when the Magi sought knowledge concerning the birth of the king (Matt. 2:1-8). Matthew records that Herod then ordered the killing of all male children two years old and under in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:13-18).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem ca. 6 b.c.e., and Christians of the early 2nd century c.e. revered a certain limestone cave as the site of the birth of the Messiah (Justin Martyr *Dial.* 78). A sacred grove at the site was dedicated to Adonis (Tammuz) in the time of Hadrian, following his suppression of the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135. Jews were expelled from Bethlehem and Jerusalem in the district of Aelia Capitolina, and numerous Jewish and Christian holy sites were desecrated. Tertullian confirms the absence of Jews in Bethlehem, and the 2nd-century Protevangelium of James (Prot. Jas. 18:1; 19:2) refers to the cave as that which Joseph found for the birth of Jesus. Origen, who traveled throughout Palestine from ca. 215, spoke of the manger of Jesus (*Contra Cels.* 1.51)

With the support of Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, the construction of the first Church of the Nativity commenced over the traditional cave of Jesus’ birth (Eusebius *Vita Const.* 3.25–32, 51–53). According to the Bordeaux Pilgrim (ca. 333) the “basilica” was constructed “at the grotto which had been the scene of the Savior’s birth” (Eusebius 3.43). The sanctuary was dedicated on 31 May 339. Jerome resided in one of the nearby caves from 385 to 420, during which he prepared the Vulgate translation.

***Bibliography.*** M. Avi-Yonah, “Bethlehem,” *NEAEHL* 1:203–10; J. Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament,* 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1992), 22–43.

R. Dennis Cole

# Questions

### What does Immanuel mean and how is this important?

### Why is Bethlehem a significant place for Jesus to be born?

# Tentative Main Ideas

Text

# Illustrations That Apply

### Text

**Immanuel: God in Place**

***Bethlehem in Scripture***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*: The evidence of “God with us” is by him being the God of place through exalting the shameful and obscure town of Bethlehem to world prominence.

# I. Stage 1: Bethlehem’s death, shame and obscurity turned to honor in David.

## Bethlehem was a town of death and shame.

### Rachel died on the road to Bethlehem (Gen 35:19).

### A Levite from Bethlehem served as a pagan priest (Judges 17).

### Bethlehem was the town of a concubine whose death almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 17–21).

### Bethlehem was the town of Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion—all who died prematurely (Ruth 1:1-5).

## But God turned the obscure town of Bethlehem into a town of life and honor.

### God honored Bethlehem with abundant crops as the “house of bread” during apostasy (Ruth 2).

### God honored Boaz and Ruth to parent David’s grandpa in Bethlehem (Ruth 4:17).

### Bethlehem took an even higher status as King David’s hometown (1 Sam 16:1; 17:58).

### “Bethlehem was apparently also the home of David’s general, Joab, and his brothers Abishai and Asahel (2 Samuel 2:18, 32), as well as of Elhanan, one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:24)” (*Dictionary of Place Names*).

# II. Stage 2: Bethlehem was honored above every city in the birth of Jesus.

## Micah prophesied for Bethlehem as Israel’s most honored town in Messiah’s birth (Micah 5:2).

### Bethlehem was considered one of the smallest towns of Judah.

### Yet God chose Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace.

## God fulfilled the promise with Bethlehem as the world’s portal for God to appear as a baby.

### Of all places on earth for God to appear in the flesh, he chose the formerly despised Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4).

### God moved people throughout the entire Roman Empire so the town of David would become the town of David’s ancestor, Jesus (Luke 2:1).

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will experience God transforming their shame into honor by faith.

**Homiletical Outline** (simple inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: We are familiar with the Christmas story but still can’t answer basic questions (examples).

### Curiosity: Can you answer these questions about Christmas? Our three-week series this month will seek to unpack the meaning of "Immanuel: God With Us” by answering these questions:

#### God in Place (this week): Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? We will answer the “Where” question.

#### God in Time (next week): Why then? Why did Jesus come at the time he did? We will answer the “When” question.

#### God in Us (week 3): Why within? We will answer the “How” question to see how God works.

### Subject: Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?

### Background: Bethlehem was a dishonored, obscure town in the obscure “right stage” of Israel.

### Preview: Today we will first see how God transformed Bethlehem and then how he transforms us.

### Texts: We will look at many passages.

(So why Bethlehem? What was God doing? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive?)

# I. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in David.

## Bethlehem was a town of death and shame.

### Rachel died on the road to Bethlehem (Gen 35:19).

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### Bethlehem was the town of a concubine whose death almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19–21).

### Bethlehem was the town of Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion—all who died prematurely (Ruth 1:1-5).

## But God turned the obscure town of Bethlehem into a town of life and honor.

### God honored Bethlehem with abundant crops as the “house of bread” during apostasy (Ruth 2).

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### Bethlehem took an even higher status as King David’s hometown (1 Sam 16:1; 17:58).

### “Bethlehem was apparently also the home of David’s general, Joab, and his brothers Abishai and Asahel (2 Samuel 2:18, 32), as well as of Elhanan, one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:24)” (*Dictionary of Place Names*).

# II. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in Jesus.

## Micah prophesied for Bethlehem as Israel’s most honored town in Messiah’s birth (Micah 5:2).

### Bethlehem was considered one of the smallest towns of Judah.

### Yet God chose Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace.

## God fulfilled his promise with Bethlehem as the world’s portal for God to appear as a baby.

### Of all places on earth for God to appear in the flesh, he chose the formerly despised Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4).

### God moved people throughout the entire Roman Empire so the town of David would become the town of David’s ancestor, Jesus (Luke 2:1).

(How does the transformation of Bethlehem relate to us personally?)

# III. God transforms our shame into honor (Main Idea).

## God is bigger than our humble backgrounds.

### He uses the insignificant places like Bethlehem to turn a shepherd into a king.

### He has honored the son of a social worker and salesman to represent him in Asia (that’s me).

## God is bigger than our failures.

### He transforms cities of shame to honor his name.

### The 12 divorces of my parents and those they married are overcome in my life by his grace.

## God chooses where we are to live.

### He gave us Eden and is preparing a new Eden for us.

### Acts 17:26, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”)

(Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?)

# Conclusion

### God transforms our shame into honor (Main Idea).

### God shows he is with us by transforming our place (Main Idea restated).

### Fuller MI: God With Us (Immanuel) means God moves us to his places (He planned Bethlehem as his entry place).

### Main Points

#### God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in David.

#### God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in Jesus.

#### God transforms our shame into honor.

### Exhortation: But how does God do this? How does he turn shame to honor? He does so by our simple trust in him.

#### Joseph and Mary simply trusted God’s word that they would birth the first baby of a virgin.

#### Shepherds believed by faith what the angels said.

#### Wise men traveled a great distance, trusting that the star would show them God’s king—but more about that next week!

### How is God moving you to his places?

#### Literally speaking, do you worship God for moving you to your new place?

#### Figuratively speaking, how does God want you to trust him to move you to a new place in your thinking about Jesus?

### Prayer

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**Rick Griffith**

16 December 2018

Message 1 of 3

**Immanuel: God in Place**

***Bethlehem in Scripture***

# Introduction

### Overview: Our 3-week study of "Immanuel: God With Us” by answering these questions:

#### God in Place (this week): Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? We will answer the “Where” question.

#### God in Time (next week): Why then? Why did Jesus come at the time he did? We will answer the “When” question.

#### God in Us (week 3): Why within? We will answer the “How” question to see how God works.

### Subject: Why Bethlehem? Why did God choose this place for Jesus to arrive? Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?

### Background: Bethlehem was a dishonored, obscure town in the obscure “right stage” of Israel.

# I. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

## Bethlehem was a town of death and shame.

### Rachel died on the road to Bethlehem (Gen 35:19).

### A Levite from Bethlehem served as a pagan priest (Judges 17–18).

### Bethlehem was the town of a concubine whose death almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19–21).

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# II. God transformed Bethlehem from shame to honor in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

## Micah prophesied for Bethlehem as Israel’s most honored town in Messiah’s birth (Micah 5:2).

### Bethlehem was considered one of the smallest towns of Judah.

### Yet God chose Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace.

## God fulfilled his promise with Bethlehem as the world’s portal for God to appear as a baby.

### Of all places on earth for God to appear in the flesh, he chose the formerly despised Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4).

### God moved people throughout the entire Roman Empire so the town of David would become the town of David’s ancestor, Jesus (Luke 2:1).

(How does the transformation of Bethlehem relate to us personally?)

# III. God transforms our shame into \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Main Idea).

## God is bigger than our humble backgrounds.

## God is bigger than our failures.

## God chooses where we are to live.

### He gave us Eden and is preparing a new Eden for us.

### Acts 17:26, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”)

(Why did God choose Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?)

# Conclusion

### God transforms our shame into \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Main Idea).

### But how does God do this? How does he turn shame to honor? He does so by our simple trust in him.

#### Joseph and Mary simply trusted God’s word that they would birth the first baby of a virgin.

#### Shepherds believed by faith what the angels said.

#### Wise men traveled a great distance, trusting that the star would show them God’s king—but more about that next week!

### How is God moving you to his places?

#### Literally speaking, do you worship God for moving you to your new place?

#### Figuratively speaking, how does God want you to trust him to move you to a new place in your thinking about Jesus?

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