

Sermon: Why Jesus?
Matthew 1:20-23

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Matthew 1:20-23

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

Sermon

A lot has changed since I was a child. I grew up, like most of you, in a time where going to church was expected within our culture. It was expected that, at the very least, your family belonged to a church and attended enough to know the pastor and some of the other families. I grew up in a culture that was still dominated by the baby-boomer generation, one that was marked by those families that endured the pain of world war 2 and returned looking to be connected with family and with faith. Church attendance grew steadily in the 50s through the 80s primarily influenced by this generation. But I also grew up with the influence of the liberation generation. These were the people influenced by the changing roles of women and minorities, by wars in SouthEast Asia and the music and drugs here at home. In many ways, this generation was still faithfully Christian, but a new part of their cultural ethos was that faith was a choice and they raised their children in this belief.

And now we live with Xers and Millennials, the children and grandchildren of the liberation generation. And as you think about the world around us, even just focusing on the church today, you see that the culture around us has shifted. No longer is faith assumed, or membership in church a foregone conclusion. With the rise in frequency of job changes, families are less likely to put down roots in any one town or one church. With the diversifying of communication and socialization, both in person and digitally, the church is no longer a primary place to find community for many younger people. And with a rise in the distrust of institutions of any kind - political, economic, or religious, the church no longer holds a default position of authority or power within our culture today.

So in a world where the expectations have changed, why does anyone come to White Lick, or to a presbyterian church, or any church for that matter? Why does any of it matter? Do we have a role in todays culture? This summer, we are going to spend some time exploring these questions, exploring what the modern role of the church might be and how we might see ourselves, not in terms of what was, but living into the possibility of what is and is to come.

But where do we need to start? I think the fundamental, base question for us is to explore the reason we choose, or anyone should choose to follow Jesus. There are many choices besides Jesus. There are countless ancient world religions to choose from, all of which we have access through in our globalized world. We can also choose to not believe in religion at all. So why Jesus?

For some of us, it is force of habit - our parents took us to church and talked to us about Jesus, so we come and talk about Jesus. For others, there has been some moment, some event, something like that moment where Thomas experienced the Risen Lord, touched his wounds, and could not help but believe. And yet for some, maybe most, we have not had that moment, nor do we feel compelled by our history to believe. Yet we do believe.

For me, this question about why I choose to believe and follow Jesus comes down to the words of Isaiah that are bestowed upon Jesus before at his birth. "Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

Names have power and meaning in the Bible so it is interesting to me that the name Emmanuel is connected with the name Jesus or Yeshoua which was Jesus' hebrew name. Jesus meant "God saves" while Emmanuel meant "God is with us".

God saves, God with us... This is how Jesus' life begins, with the expectation of what will happen, who Jesus will be. And this is the criteria for how we should judge if Jesus is worthy of worship.

God with us: does Jesus exemplify who God is and what God is doing? What does Jesus do? What does Jesus say? How does Jesus live out his life? It is up to each of us, to examine the text, to examine the world, and to examine our life. He was born with the names "God with Us" and "God saves". I follow Christ because I believe he lives up to his names. Thanks be to God. Amen