

With Us in the Waiting

Text: Matthew 1:18–25 (CSB)

Core Theme/Big Idea

Immanuel: God With Us in the Uncertainty. God faithfully enters our story through unexpected circumstances—including confusion, strained reputations, and uncertainty—to promise His **presence** and guide us even when the path ahead is unclear.

Discussion Questions

Warm-up: The Strain of Waiting

1. **Waiting** is often a key part of life, whether for an answer, a resolution, or a decision. Share a time when you were in a season of waiting where the path forward felt especially **confusing or uncertain**.
2. Joseph was described as a "**righteous man**" (v. 19), yet his plan to divorce Mary was based on protecting their **reputations** and following the Law. How do we sometimes let our desire for a respectable, clear path **prevent** us from seeing God's unexpected direction?

Deeper Dive: God Enters the Confusion

3. The central crisis of this story involves **reputation** and **confusion**. What were the potential consequences for Joseph and Mary's reputations in their community? How does God's choice to work through this messy, public situation reveal His priorities?
4. The angel's message is simple but powerful: "**don't be afraid**" (v. 20) and a promise, "**God is with us**" (Immanuel, v. 23). Why is the assurance of **presence** (God is *with* us) the essential solution to fear and confusion?
5. Joseph moves from a place of uncertainty to action (v. 24: "he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him"). What was the key evidence Joseph had that allowed him to trust and act on God's direction over his own original, "righteous" plan?

Application: Waiting on Immanuel Today

6. Look at the word **Immanuel**. How does focusing on the *active presence* of God transform your current season of **waiting** or **uncertainty**? Does it change your sense of urgency?
7. What small step of **courageous obedience**, like Joseph's decision to "take Mary as his wife" (v. 24), might God be asking you to take this week in the midst of your own unclear situation?

Application/Next Steps

Practice Presence: When anxiety or confusion creeps in this week, pause and whisper the name "Immanuel." Remind yourself that God's faithful presence is an active reality, not a future promise. Note one specific situation where this reminder brought peace.

Prayer Focus

- **Trust:** Pray for the **faith** of Joseph—the willingness to surrender our "righteous" or planned path in favor of God's unexpected, clearer, and yet initially confusing direction.
- **Presence:** Thank God that He is **Immanuel**—with us—in the midst of our present confusion, and that His presence is our true security, not a perfect reputation or clear plan.

Suggested Answers for Facilitators (Deeper Dive)

3. The central crisis of this story involves reputation and confusion... How does God's choice to work through this messy, public situation reveal His priorities?

- **Suggested Points:**
 - **Consequences:** Mary risked public disgrace/stoning; Joseph risked the scandal of marrying a visibly pregnant woman, compromising their community standing and reputation for piety.
 - **God's Priority:** God prioritized the **fulfillment of His plan** and the **salvation of the world** over the social comforts and reputations of Joseph and Mary. He demonstrates that His work is not limited by human judgment or social scandal.
 - **Teaching Focus:** God often calls us to a path that is **publicly messy** but **divinely directed**, forcing us to rely on His truth over others' opinions.

4. Why is the assurance of presence (God is *with* us) the essential solution to fear and confusion?

- **Suggested Points:**
 - **Presence vs. Clarity:** Joseph was confused by the details. God didn't resolve the details immediately; He provided the promise of **His presence**. Knowing *Who* is with you is more important than knowing *where* you are going.
 - **Immanuel is Sufficient:** Fear and confusion thrive on **isolation**. The promise of **Immanuel** completely removes isolation. If God is with us, no problem is bigger than the One standing beside us.
 - **Teaching Focus:** The solution to fear is not always the **resolution** of the problem, but the **reliance** on God who is *in* the problem with us.

5. What was the key evidence Joseph had that allowed him to trust and act on God's direction over his own original, "righteous" plan?

- **Suggested Points:**
 - **Divine Intervention:** The key evidence was the **dream** and the **specific, supernatural message** from the angel, which directly countered his "righteous" human logic.
 - **Prophetic Fulfillment (Immanuel):** The angel connected the unexpected situation to the **ancient, established promise** of God through the prophet Isaiah (v. 23). This showed Joseph the chaos was part of God's long-term, trustworthy plan.
 - **The Purity of the Call:** The message clarified that the pregnancy was due to the **Holy Spirit**, shifting his understanding from adultery/scandal to a divine miracle.
 - **Teaching Focus:** Our clearest evidence for action often comes from **aligning our circumstances with God's revealed Word** (Prophecy/Scripture) and the clear, divine nature of His call.