



One of the carols often sung at Christmas is *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. The name *Emmanuel*, the Greek translation, or *Immanuel*, the Hebrew translation, both mean the same thing - God with us. Even though we're familiar with the name Immanuel, what does it mean and what difference does it make for how we live today? That's what we're going to discover in this new Advent series "God with us".

1. Have you heard the phrase "human flourishing"? What do you think this means? What are some ways we try to achieve human flourishing apart from God?
2. **Background:** Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the twelve tribes of Israel, and were the first tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to be invaded and deported by the Assyrians. They were first invaded by Assyria around 732 BC, and Samaria (the capital of the Northern Kingdom) was captured in 721 BC. Judah, except for Jerusalem, was taken by 701 BC. Choosing their own way rather than God's way, trusting in human glory rather than in God, the nation plunged itself into darkness. However, that is not where God intended to leave them. Read **Isaiah 9:1-7** to find out what God planned to do by grace for a people who rebelled against him and were living in darkness.
3. In Isaiah 9:1-5, through Isaiah, God gives a prophecy of human flourishing, (a.k.a. Shalom or Peace) to a people living in darkness, gloom and anguish. What are the 5 aspects of human flourishing described in these verses?
4. Looking at what God says he will do, do you believe God can orchestrate this kind of human flourishing for people who have sinned against God and are living in darkness, gloom and anguish today? Explain.
5. Isaiah 9:6-7 describes how God plans to bring about this human flourishing. What are the characteristics of the One who will usher in this human flourishing? What do these names reveal about him? Combined with Isaiah 7:14, to whom is this prophecy pointing? (See Matthew 1:18-25).
6. The good news of this passage for us today is that the God who is with us is a God who wants to turn our darkness into light, our conflict into peace, our loss into abundance, our despair into joy. Do you believe that real human flourishing is only available through the birth of this one-of-a-kind Child-King? Have you allowed this Child – King to take over the government of your life?
7. Ultimately the human flourishing prophesied in these verses will be accomplished in the return of this King. How does that give you peace and hope today?