

"Immanuel" - A small note on Christian doctrine

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This important word in Templar ritual is Hebrew and gives the sense of "God with us." It is found in Isaiah (7:14; 8:8,10), where the prophet seems to predict the birth of a child from the tribe of Judah who would choose good and reject evil. The time frame is about the eighth century B.C., and the name is clearly symbolic. It became significant in Christian doctrine primarily because of two factors:

1.) The entire verse in the KJV reads, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This is precisely the verse that resulted in the doctrine of the virgin birth finding its way into Christian theology.

The actual translation of this verse and particularly the word translated as "virgin" has been the source of many scholarly disputes for the entire history of Christianity. One does not need to be an expert in either Hebrew or Greek to understand the essential controversy. The Hebrew word is *almah* and is generally translated as "maiden" or "young maiden," not necessarily denoting virginity, for which the Hebrew is *betulah* and could be further defined to avoid ambiguity, such as in Gen. 24:16. When the Book of Isaiah was translated into Greek, the word *parthenos* was chosen to translate the Hebrew word *almah*. *Parthenos* specifically means "virgin," and it was this Greek version that was the one available and used by the writers

of the New Testament. It is safe to say that they probably could not have even read the Hebrew original. Further, Hebrew present and future tenses tend to be ambiguous, and the passage could be translated with "has become pregnant" as easily as "will become pregnant." (See Gen. 16:11, where "thou art with child" is the same Hebrew grammatical construction as Isaiah 7:14).

2.) The second factor that led to the importance of this word to Christians is its presumed messianic character and the

belief that Jesus was in fact the predicted Hebrew Messiah. Thus he was "Immanuel." This is specifically stated in the New Testament (Matthew 1:23): "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (KJV). Here we see Matthew applying Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus just as he does other events that happened in Israel's history. (See especially Matt. 2:15,18; 4:15-16; 10:35-36; 12:40; 13:35; 15:8-9). In the first example, Matthew is attempting to relate a passage from Hosea 11:1 as a prophecy related to Jesus when the clear intent of Hosea is simply to remind his audience that God delivered Israel from Egypt at the Exodus. Matthew does not commonly give translations of Hebrew names; his purpose in doing so in the case of "Emmanuel" clearly indicates that he wanted to stress the miraculous birth of Jesus and that Isaiah's words were specifically applicable to him. Some have seen a recapitulation of the meaning of the name (God with us) in Christ's words "I am with you" that are Jesus' last words in Matthew's Gospel. This might lead us logically to the translation and origin of the name "Jesus," but that is for another article.

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