

About...

## Emmanuel

### ...how and why it was written

I was inspired to write this song about the incarnation a couple of months after one Christmas... a few months earlier I had written a Christmas appeal for Christian Aid about love – the real meaning of Christmas, and this was one in a series of stimuli that got me thinking about the incarnation a bit more deeply.

Rightly so, much of our worship focuses on the cross, and when we mention the incarnation it is often as an underlining concept which furthers the sense of mystery of Jesus' sacrifice. But there is a place for considering the incarnation in more detail – it's a moot point, but even if the cross hadn't happened, the incarnation would still be absolutely incredible. God loves us so much that he came and dwelt with us – in the midst of our pain, sin and brokenness.

The incarnation, and the continuing presence of God amongst us through His Holy Spirit is an incredible gift to us – one which I can't do justice to in a song, a few paragraphs here, or through any other means... but it is especially poignant and helpful to consider in reference to our love and service of the disadvantaged.

God has a special heart for the broken, and it is them he chooses to dwell with – what better testament to His love and plans of redemption and transformation. Similarly, Jesus' example suggests that our service of the poor should also be incarnational – dwelling with and amongst, and seeking to walk alongside.

*Emmanuel* was written to capture in a song some of the concepts and inspirational ideas that I had previously written about for Christian Aid. (We then went on to use this song in the following year's appeal materials.)

### ...how, where and when it could be used

This is a congregational worship song and works well in this context. In a worship set it connects well to songs which then talk about the concepts of meekness and majesty on the cross.

It isn't written specifically as a Christmas song, but obviously the heavy echoing of Isaiah 9 and the incarnational theme does make it especially relevant at this time. And this is useful because Christmas in churches that are charismatic, or principally make use of modern songs, can be a strangely schizophrenic time – we often either revert to traditional songs and carols completely, try to charismatic up hymns or carols, or use worship songs which focus on the incarnation briefly but are, as discussed above, primarily about the cross.

I would hope though that it would be used at other times of year as well – like the cross, the incarnation never ceases to be relevant – it is a crucial reminder of God's heart of love for the poor, the lost and the broken.

### **...its place on the journey to where world and worship meet**

As mentioned above, the incarnation provides a special insight into the heart of God, and in particular for our brokenness. Jesus humbled himself, laid aside his majesty, to dwell with, and walk amongst the least of society... and he calls us to do the same.

Using a song like *Emmanuel* in worship helps us focus in on this truth. It reminds us that God is not scared, or intimidated, by the extent of our world's brokenness. It highlights that he is intentional and passionate about intervening because he loves us even in this brokenness. And it helps us guard our hearts against religious superiority or a false raising of 'standards' of who is welcome – God continues to come for the least, the last and the lost. (And this includes us.)