

For the two semesters that I studied Hebrew in graduate school, I had many ups and downs.

Studying a new language does funny things to your brain.

Praying the Psalms in English, every now and again, I'd "freeze up" on a sentence or a phrase ... realizing that my vocabulary had expanded to the point where I actually knew how to say it in Hebrew.

While my facility with Hebrew has faded a bit in the ensuing years, one word that caught me unawares was "Immanuel." We were just learning adjectives, and noun possessives ... when my brain put together the three things that make up that word:

im = with

anu = us

El = God

There was something about seeing the word in its original language that sort of stunned me, and drew me out of the drudgery of memorizing vocabulary and verb conjugations.

In a similar way, as we approach the end of Advent, let us pray for the grace to be drawn out of our day-to-day efforts, and into the marvels of what we are recalling - God has become one of us.

And as we approach this altar to receive the sacred Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us step out of the busy-ness of the season, and pause a moment ... asking for the graces of wonder and awe at so great a gift ... a gift we may often take for granted.

God truly is with us.

Immanuel.