

Advent V what if God is with us - NOW?"

What if God is with us - NOW!?!

Matthew 1:23 (ESV) ... "and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (repeat)

What if God is with us – NOW?!?! - How would it matter? - What would it change?

Christmas traditions in every family – are different and wide ranging. For example:

* *In our family we play lots of games, cut down a live tree to decorate, get in a game of disc golf, watch Elf.*

* *The Agovinos do a lobster meal with his parents.*

* *The McCains drive – to Kansas and Texas. Their Christmas involves lots of road time and a boar hunt for B.*

* *I heard from a family this week that their favorite is making Christmas cookies with a cookie dough fight.*

* *I heard from another family that makes cookies for most of the neighbors.*

Pic of Goat / *For almost 50 years the Swedish town of Gavle has erected a giant Goat made of straw to mark the beginning of the Christmas holiday season. Every year vandals do everything they can to burn down the goat before Christmas Day. People ingeniously disguise themselves as Santa Claus or elves to get past the guardians and ignite the straw monument. However, since 1966, the Straw Goat has survived until Christmas Day only 10 times.*

Pic of Food / *In Slovakia and the Ukraine there is a food throwing tradition. At the beginning of Christmas Eve dinner, the head of the family takes a spoon of *Loksa and throws it up at the ceiling. The more mixture that remains glued on the ceiling the richer his crops will be the follow. Not always but often what follows the fathers ceiling toss – is a full on food fight with this Loksa dish.*

Pic of Log / *In Spain they have an unusual, and some might say strange, tradition of log presents called Caga Tio meaning "empty your bowels". The custom calls for children to sing songs as they strike the log or Caga Tio which is made from a trunk of a tree with a face drawn on it and a red barratino hat added and wrapped in a blanket. Caga Tio sits on top of a small pile of presents in the lounge. On January 6th children, upon waking, run to strike their Christmas log as they sing songs that order Caga Tio to loosen his bowels and drop the presents. Usually small treats and nougats or chocolates are found under Caga Tio. It is lots of fun but definitely a unique custom not known to be practiced elsewhere. And very grateful we are too.*

Wonderful presents that are beautifully wrapped – are part of the Christmas tradition for many. Some even use them as decorations outside their house. That is they place huge beautifully wrapped presents outside their house. I saw a couple of weeks ago that thieves took some presents like this outside a home in Arizona only to return them with a note that said. These are awful presents. They were empty on purpose – because they were decorations, but our wise thief didn't know this. These kind of packages make cool decorations but they make awful presents unless your a two year old that likes the paper and boxes more than the actual gift. Many who go to church and claim to be Christians - unfortunately- are like these presents. They look great on the outside but underneath, they are all the show - there is no presence of the living Jesus. There is no life, no reality, nothing of God with us, in us - it's all just ... show.

What if God is with us now?

1. What if God was in our world and active in the affairs of nations and active in the greater happenings on this earth? **Would it give you hope and comfort or would it make you mad that He is not doing more?**
2. What if God was in our world - calling you to join Him in a something greater than all your successes or failures. **What if the successes you've had or the failures you've experienced were all a part of His greater plan - not to make you great, but to bring you in to be a part of something Great. What if all your plans and work were somehow pointing you to see God's greater work in this world that he was calling you to join him in. Would it give you a powerful hope and purpose or would it make you disappointed that God and his work is the greatness he has called you to?**
3. What if God was with you – in you? **What would it be like if God was in this room, and sitting in this chair when you came into this room?**

- *Can you imagine what our worship would be like?*
- *Can you imagine what "O Come Let Us Adore Him" would have sounded like?*
- *Can you imagine what you would do after this service, who you would tell?*
- *And can you imagine – how many services we would have to have if people heard God was here in this room?*

Go one step further – what would it be like if God was not just in this room – but in you?

What if God could lived inside you, moved with you, engaged with you, loved you? What if God was with you? *Would it change how you see God? Would it change how you see you and others? Could He, could his presence be life changing for you?*

The Promise of God – "I will be with you!"

Leviticus 26:11-12 (ESV) 11 I will make my dwelling among you, ... 12 And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV) For to us a child is (will be) born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

For centuries over 20 different times God promised He would not only be with His us – but He would come to this earth to be with us.

- When the time was perfect in God's eyes – he wrapped himself in skin – and allowed a young girl to push him through a birth canal into this world – so God could be with us. Almighty God who lived in great peace and order – entered our chaos our mess. *But there was more to God being with us than Jesus being born 2000 years ago into this world. His birth into this world as a man who was all God was vital – but just a part.*
- He then lived a life – full of love, mercy, justice, grace, giving, healing, caring. He lived a perfect sinless life – the life we should have lived. And this was hugely important. He didn't just enter our mess, he engaged in our mess and brought love, healing, redemption, restoration – a picture of how things will one day be restored in Christ. *And this was vital as well, but this was just another part.*
- Jesus, God then died – in our place, in my place, and in your place. He entered our mess, engaged in our mess – and *then he took all the punishment for our mess in his death on the cross.* This allows for us to be with God. You see – what separates God from you and I – is not distance, or your good works, - *it is your mess of sin and rebellion that resides in your heart.* And no amount of you trying to move yourself toward God will effort bridge the distance between you and God – because it is not about space it is about sin. It is not about distance – it is about rebellion. And God did the unthinkable, the amazing, the beautiful – instead of punishing you, instead of crushing your rebellion with power – *he crushed his Son instead, he punished Jesus in your place – so you could be with God.*
- Then, Jesus rose from the dead. This too was needed and vital. Because in rising from the dead, he conquered the greatest fear we all believe will keep us from God – death. Jesus rose from the dead proving his perfect life and his power as God is greater than your rebellion and your death.
- Then, Jesus physically left this earth to be with the God the Father. *Why???* To send His Spirit, the very presence of God to be with us.

God is with us now. In this place, in this very room.

What separates Him from you is not space or distance – just your heart.

All your good works, all your outward wrappings, all your efforts to look good do not bring you into the presence of God.

How do we know God with us now? *How does God live in us now?*

Faith – Trust that Jesus came, lived, died, rose – for you. Throw yourself, sit yourself on the person and work of Jesus.

- **He has done all the work – He came, he lived perfectly, died for all your guilt and shame, and rose to conquer death and sin.**
- **He has done all the work – you simply trust, faith Jesus. AND HE WILL COME to be WITH YOU NOW.**

John 1:12 (NLT) But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

Believe- trust that Jesus is God and that he came to be with us now and he did that through his life, death, and resurrection so you could be with Him. *So you could have comfort in this world – bc he is here.*

So you could know His great plan that he calls you to join him in. And, mostly, so you could know the loving and powerful presence of God come to live in you. When he comes – guilt, shame begin to leave. You will begin to sense his love and even more his like of you. Trust him now.

PRAYER

Christ follower – maybe you feel like God is far from you now. Maybe your actions, your passion, your life has been anything but the things that God is about in this world. *Maybe you have been about trying to make you great this past year – and you have forgotten you were called to be a part of someone great – in Christ.* No work needed – just believe – the cross did enough for God to be with you now and his promise – I will never leave you.

Matthew 28:20 (NLT) “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”