

# God With Us

## Christmas Eve 2020

My wife loves horses, so she loves barns – the smells, the equipment, the animals. But as much as she enjoys barns, I don't think she would choose to give birth there. And yet, Jesus was born in a place something like this....animals around...smells of feed & hay. Mary and Joseph lay Jesus down for his first nap in a manger --- which is what we call a "feeding trough."

Nobody expected the Messiah of Israel to be born in spot like this. But nothing about Jesus' birth was an accident. It was part of the eternal plan of God. Around 700 years before Jesus was born, God spoke to the prophet Isaiah about his plan.

**Isaiah 7:14** *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.*

Centuries later, Matthew tells us that prophecy was fulfilled on the night Jesus was born in that barn in Bethlehem.

**Matthew 1:22-23** *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us.")*

"God with us" --- when Jesus was born, God entered our world in the form of a Middle Eastern baby. He became one of us. He cried and he slept in a feeding trough. Jesus was born in a barn because that is where Mary and Joseph were. God entered their world; and he enters ours today when we invite him in.

We need to hear that more than ever today. Christmas 2020 might feel like a disappointment. We usually think of Christmas as a time of joy with family and celebrations. But this year, many of us may be feeling let down because our parties are canceled, our traditional get togethers may be restricted and we can't see our friends and family except on Zoom. Maybe you're tired from making countless decisions about kids, finances, maybe even health. Where is God in Christmas 2020? "God is with us."

"God with us" – that is not just another one of Jesus' names – it describes the eternal purpose of God. The book of Genesis says that after God created the heavens and the earth, he created human beings. Now, God didn't have to create people. God is perfect, so he could have been perfectly happy without creating us. He created humanity to be *with him*, to know him. And after God created people, everything was great. The Garden of Eden was paradise. People had it good and God was with them. When people woke up in the morning, God was there to say "Hello." When people cared for the animals and creation around them, God delighted in them. When it was lunch time, God showed them all the food he had created that they could eat. Life was good. There was no disease, no conflict. Everything was the way God intended... for a while.

But then, sin happened. People disobeyed God and the Bible says that the first thing they did was hide from him. The relationship between God and people was broken by sin. Life on earth began to unravel. The rest of the Bible tells the story of God working to restore the relationship between himself and people. And that is why Jesus came. Jesus came to restore God's original purpose. And Jesus came to make it possible for us to fulfill our purpose in life.

Sometimes we think of our purpose in life is accomplishing a certain task. And God does give us things to fulfill on this earth. The main point of life is to do it with God. If we are not, then we will feel that something is missing. It's a lot like marriage that way. I've been married to my wife Linda for over 40 years now. I am closer to her than to any other person on the planet. But a few months into our marriage, I was not a happy husband. I loved Linda but I didn't love how life was going. We had moved to Kentucky so I could go to seminary, and we had just found out we were expecting our first child. We had no money. We were living in a trailer on a farm where I worked off the rent. To raise money for school, I was also working full-time as a janitor and part-time at a taco place. Linda was working at the University of Kentucky.

So each morning we'd get up and then Linda would throw up from morning sickness. Then she'd make a brown bag lunch. Then we'd drive into town. She would drop me at work since I started an hour earlier than she did. After I finished, I'd study while I waited for her, and eventually we'd get home to the trailer, which was about 150 degrees inside from the Kentucky sun. Usually I worked my other job in the evening. Then we'd get up the next morning to do it all over again. I remember looking around one day and thinking, "This is not fun. This was not what I thought I had signed up for when we got married." But actually it was.

The reason Linda and I got married was that we loved each other and wanted to be together for the rest of our lives. We didn't get married in order to travel or to have fun or buy a house or start a ministry or even to raise children. We've done all those things; but the point of getting married was to do whatever we did *together*. The whole point of marriage is to do life *together*, for better for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. Since Linda and I have gone through the highs and lows of life, we are bonded together more tightly than I could ever have imagined.

Ephesians 5 says that the relationship between a husband and wife reflects the relationship between the Lord and us, his people. The whole point of life is to experience it *with God*. As we go through the highs and lows of life with God, we are deeply bonded to him. I like to tell couples the wedding vow says, "I'll be with you no matter what." And after Jesus rose from the dead, he told his disciples, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20)

We each are here on earth for a reason, whether we know it or not. But we're not created just to do things for God; He didn't create us because he needed staff – he created us to be his sons and daughters.

We are here to accomplish our purpose WITH God; not FOR God.

We're not created to work a certain job, we're here to work a job WITH GOD. Our purpose is not just to raise a family, it is to raise a family WITH GOD. We're not here just to help the poor or to solve social problems or to have fun, we're here to do those things WITH HIM.

And we can do that because Jesus – Immanuel – has come. Opening ourselves up to the presence of God will change our lives.

### **Inviting God's presence enriches every moment**

It's more fun to go to a ball game with friends than going alone. The same is true for most activities in life. I've participated in a number of free car wash outreaches; that's where we wash people's cars and don't take any donation as a way to show God's love in a practical way. Now, if I'd been washing cars by myself it would have been a chore – a task. But since I was doing it with others, it was fun! We told jokes and stories – we teamed up so each person did a part. (We told the short people to wash the wheels since they were closer to the ground.) Washing the cars with others transformed the experience. Doing life every day with God enriches every moment. We can get up each morning and say, "What are we going to do today, Lord?" The Lord wants to be in English class with us; he wants to go to the soccer game with us, he wants to relax in the chair with us. He'll even go to the dentist with us. Whatever we are doing, he wants to be with us.

Doing life with God reduces our stress because he helps us with whatever we are doing. When you are trying to solve a problem at work or repair a broken friendship, God wants us to ask for his help. That will bond us together. Our life is to be a joint venture with Immanuel. *God doesn't just watch us; he is with us.*

### **Inviting God's presence will heal our past.**

When going through a painful experience, we might ask, "Why did God let this happen?" We won't know the reason behind every painful event this side of heaven, but when we ask, "Where was God?" we know the answer. God was with us. He was right there. And he will heal us from it.

### **Inviting God's presence drains worry**

Worry starts with imagining "what if..."

What if this happens? Jesus answers us, "I will be with you, even to the end of the age."

"What if I get sick?" The answer is: Jesus will be there and he will be at work.

"What if I lose my job?" Jesus will be there and he will be at work.

"What if I never find someone to marry?" Jesus will be there and he will be at work.

That's why we can have confidence about the future.

**Psalm 23:4** *"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*

Jesus is “God is with us.” That means:

- \* God is not “out there somewhere...” God is with us right here, right now
- \* God is not “The Big Man upstairs...” God is with us down here.
- \* God is not just a “Higher Power” – his power is higher than ours
- \* Jesus is Immanuel - GOD WITH US.

Jesus came to where he could be found.

If he'd been born in a palace, the shepherds couldn't have seen him.

But in a barn – anyone had could find him.

**John 1:14** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Hallelujah!