



EMMANUEL

GOD WITH US

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL AND COMPANION TO THE
SERMON SERIES OF THE SAME NAME FROM
PASTOR JEREMY DEGROOT AT FBC SILOAM SPRINGS

EMMANUEL

As we celebrate Christmas this year, I want to spend the season with you discovering just what it means that God is “with” us. This season’s sermon series and Advent devotional seek to look closely at that statement - in its many and varied ways.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew spelling of the name is “Emmanuel.” In the Greek version of the Old Testament, we read “Immanuel.” They are different ways to spell the same name.

I have chosen the Old Testament version because it speaks to the coming incarnation of Christ. As the song “O Little Town Bethlehem recounts, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” This represents a perfect segue from what God told us in the Old Testament scriptures and what Jesus does for us in the New Covenant.

In this devotional, each week opens with a theme, Nativity narrative to read, main text listing, and a Christmas carol to tie into the theme. In addition, I have included a quote from Athanasius' powerful work written prior to 319AD called *On the Incarnation*. In this work, Athanasius writes about why the Word of the Father became a man. It is truly an enlightening piece of literature.

So join me each day this Advent season for a short devotional and thought about what it means that “God is with us.”

Pastor Jeremy



"What, then, was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ? Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the Image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father Who could recreate man made after the Image."

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, "The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution in the Incarnation"

Week 1 – "God With Us"

Theme: The Joy of Christ
Nativity Narrative: Mary (Luke 1:26-66)
Main Text: Isaiah 7:14
Carol: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

November 27th, 2022

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

Isaiah 7:14 (NLT)

As we begin this Advent season, we focus on what Advent truly means: "a coming;" let us think deeply about what it truly means that God is *with us*.

For so long, through all of the Old Testament writings and prophets, very rarely was the personal nature of God displayed. Sure, He appeared in a burning bush, He spoke to Abraham, His voice was spoken through the mouths of the prophets, but now - at this moment, Isaiah is telling mankind that God will be "with" us. Among us. Near us. God is not far off, He's right there in the midst of your joy, your pain, your questions, and your contentment. He is with us. Jesus is with us.

Question to Ponder:

Why is "*with*" in the name, *God with us*, so important to us for daily living with Jesus.

**GOD IS NOT FAR OFF, HE'S
RIGHT THERE IN THE MIDST
OF YOUR JOY, YOUR PAIN,
YOUR QUESTIONS, AND
YOUR CONTENTMENT.**



November 28th, 2022

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders.

*And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
Isaiah 9:6 (NLT)

In Isaiah 7, we read that Messiah will be called "God with us." In Isaiah 9, we read that Messiah will be called a list of other powerful and amazing titles.

Look at each of the titles:

Wonderful Counselor - The source of wisdom by which we can drink deep.

Mighty God - God Himself and His might is available to us and with us.

Everlasting Father - Think about the fact that this child is also called the "Everlasting Father!"

Prince of Peace - When the storm clouds gather, the One With Us speaks peace.

Question to Ponder:

Which titles of Jesus in Isaiah 9 do you need to connect with most right now? Start the conversation with Him about it.

November 29th, 2022

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)

As we peer into the theme of joy, it's interesting to read this scripture and really identify the joy that was awaiting Christ on the other side of the cross: to forgive those He came to rescue.

He endured the cross to experience the joy of restoring those who were in death's shadow. He endured the shame of the cross to eliminate the shame of those He came to redeem. Jesus' joy is on the other side of the cross, so is ours. What's on the other side of a cross when you find your life in Christ? A resurrection.

Question to Ponder:

What are some things that bring you joy, especially at this time of year? Make sure you take time to experience joy in the midst of the busy season.

November 30th, 2022

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John 1:14 (NLT)

The phrase John uses is, "became human," the Greek word for "tabernacled." Jesus camped temporarily among us - while we wandered in the wilderness. He stepped into our mess, our suffering, our complaining, and our sin. Why? That's the essence of our theme this week: "God with us."

Look at the sentence after that: "He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness," He had to be. Only a good and gracious God could step into this world and redeem it with *unfailing* love. Through it, He revealed the glory of the Father, the truest picture of God we would ever see. Consider the lines from "O Come All Ye Faithful,": *Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!*

O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Question to Ponder:

Why is Christ's *unfailing* love so paramount to the truth that "God is with us?" How are these truths connected?

December 1st, 2022

This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 (NLT)

The idea of "God with us," was apparent well before Isaiah spoke it through prophecy. Seven hundred years earlier, God told Joshua that He would be with Him - wherever he went.

I remember days gone past, when Toby, my son, learned to jump off a diving board. I stood behind him giving encouragement. That encouragement was centered on, "I'm with you the whole time." I spoke to him directly, but lovingly, to jump in - and he did!

I noticed that after a while that he stopped waiting for me to join him on the diving board and he just jumped in. When I asked him why he didn't wait for me, he responded with a beautiful truth, "I just remembered what you said." Well done, son.

The same is true for us. God is with us - leading, guiding, loving, and living. What joy Jesus must experience when we remember His words, and walk in strength and courage knowing that He promised to be with us wherever we go.

Question to Ponder:

What does it mean that the Lord is "with you wherever you go?"



December 2nd, 2022

For the Lord your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)

This is one of the most joyful, yet tender, verses in all of scripture. Right in the middle of a word of rebuke from the Lord to Jerusalem comes this joyful prophecy. It is a soft and gentle reminder that God is "with us."

The "disconnect" that we create between God and us has never been there. "The Lord your God is living among you," not distant, not far off, close to you in your heartbreak or sickness of the heart. Among you.

Notice His title: "mighty savior."

Jesus would come into our world as Word of the Father to calm our fears. Our Mighty Savior takes delight in us, He rejoices over us. What a picture! God with Us, *Emmanuel*, born in a humble animal stall in Bethlehem living among us - when we least expected, or deserved it. Joy to the World!

Question to Ponder:

Jesus rejoices over us with singing. Pick a familiar Christmas carol today and rejoice in Him with singing. Which one will you choose, and why?

December 3rd, 2022

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:20 (NLT)

Matthew records the final words of Jesus in his gospel: His "withness." God had always been with them, Jesus had been with them in physical form, and now God would continue to be with them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

During this time of year we might have family stay at our home for an extended stay. It's great while they are with us, we enjoy the time together. When they leave, their mark is still left on the house.

We may see the places where they slept, maybe they left their toothbrush behind, maybe their cologne or perfume still hangs in the air for a few days. Their "withness" soon departs. The point is, part of them remains - but it always fades away like they were never there.

It's just the opposite with Jesus, His "withness" never departs!" Because He gave us the Holy Spirit, He's always here - *with* us. His scent never leaves (II Cor. 2:15), we see places where He worked and is still working (Rom. 8:28), and He left us a gift (John 16:7).

The glory of Emmanuel, God with Us, is that He has always been with us, and He always will be with us - even to the very end of the age!

Question to Ponder:

Look at back at times in your life where it was evident that God was *with* you. How did you know? What happened? Have you shared that story with anyone?



"Fitting indeed, then, and wholly consonant was the death on the cross for us; and we can see how reasonable it was, and why it is that the salvation of the world could be accomplished in no other way. Even on the cross He did not hide Himself from sight; rather, He made all creation witness to the presence of its Maker. Then, having once let it be seen that it was truly dead, He did not allow that temple of His body to linger long, but forthwith on the third day raised it up, impassable and incorruptible, the pledge and token of His victory."

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, "The Resurrection"

Week 2 - "God For Us"

Theme: The Love of Christ

Nativity Narrative: The Shepherds and Army of Heaven's Angels (Luke 2:8-20)

Main Text: Romans 8:31-39

Carol: "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

December 4th, 2022

31 What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? 32 Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? 33 Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. 34 Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Romans 8:31-34 (NLT)

Love. It brought Him to the cross. It overpowered death in victory. It removes the barrier between us and Him. Its ferocious nature overwhelms us when we need Him most. Love compelled Christ. Love drove Christ. Love is Christ. That's why we can say that God is *for us*. But what does that mean?

It means that not only is He with us, but that He's here, now, fighting the fight of faith *for us*. In a beautiful way, God demonstrated this ferocious love for us by using an angel army to announce Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds. From day one, God wanted to make sure we understood that He was "for" us. Fighting for us. Jealous for us. Striving for us. Dying for us. Rising for us.

And if God is *for us*, who can ever be against us?

Question to Ponder:

As you re-read Romans 8:31-34, list some ways that God is for us. Why is this Good News?

December 5th, 2022

35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? 36 (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") 37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

Romans 8:35-37 (NLT)

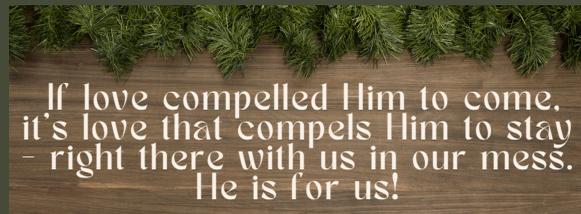
When we think of God being *for us*, we should try to grasp the idea of God fighting *for us*. The Lord is a warrior.

This week, I asked you to read Luke's narrative because it involves the angel army. It's so interesting that a baby was announced by an army of angels. In using an army (or *host*), God is announcing His reign and victory. God's love was the reason He came for us.

If love was the reason for His incarnation, think about what that means for those who are His! If love compelled Him to come, it's love that compels Him to stay - right there with us in our mess. He is *for us*!

Question to Ponder:

How can God fight for you this week?



December 6th, 2022

38 *And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

Why did Jesus come? The answer is found in Romans 8 of all places: to reveal the love of God.

God revealed His all-encompassing, never-ending, tried and true love in Christ. How much does God love you? The answer is Jesus.

Look at the list of things Paul writes that tend to stand in the way of our true understanding of God's love - it's vast.

Jesus came to us and for us so that we could look at that list of worries, powers, schemes, and lies and firmly fix our eyes on the love of God: the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

Question to Ponder:

Which of the items in Paul's list in Romans 8 tend to shout the loudest, trying to make you doubt God's love for you? Hand that over to God and remind yourself of Romans 8:39.

December 7th, 2022

5 *In my distress I prayed to the Lord,
and the Lord answered me and set me free.*

6 *The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear.
What can mere people do to me?*

7 *Yes, the Lord is for me; he will help me.*

*I will look in triumph at those who hate me.
Psalm 118:5-7 (NLT)*

Before you read on - read Psalm 118 in its entirety. Seriously - read the whole psalm!

This psalm tells the entire story of God's love for mankind! It tells of times of trouble and calamity, sorrow and fear - and then God comes running - because He is for us!

CHRIST CAME IN FLESH AS THE ANSWER TO OUR SPIRITUAL MISERY.

Although Psalms isn't a collection of Christmas carols, you can't help but hear how Christ's coming in flesh was the only answer for all the misery in which Israel found themselves. The same rings true for us; Christ came in flesh as the answer to our spiritual misery. This psalm is full of problems that only Christ has the answer for.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus

Born to set Thy people free;

From our fears and sins release us,

Let us find our rest in Thee.

Question to Ponder:

Re-read Psalm 118. Identify different problems brought up by the psalmist and how Jesus was the solution. How can this speak into your life today?

December 8th, 2022

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

1 John 3:16 (NLT)

This is the "other" John 3:16, and interestingly enough - they both share a common thought: God loved us so He gave up His life/Son **for** us. In the world we live today, it can be difficult to determine what is real from what is not: email scams, food items, news stories, and even people. We live in a world that continually causes us to investigate the veracity of everything: even love, it's sad.

But with Christ, there is no investigation needed. John says that we know *real* love.

The word "real" isn't included in the Greek manuscript, yet translators have kept it in modern translations because of the word *love* that John uses: agapen. It is love that finds its true definition in God. Agape love needs no investigation, no test, and no second guessing because it is God's love embodied and

displayed to us in Christ. Agape love is real love. Agape love is the truth that God is *for* us - in all things, in all ways, at all times. That, my friends, is Good News.

Question to Ponder:

Because we know that Christ's love is agape love, therefore it is real love; how can that change our perspective of how Christ loves us - in all things, in all ways, at all times?

Think on that today.

December 9th, 2022

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus, right now, is guarding you?

In 2017, results found that Americans spend 20 billion dollars on home security systems, and that number is probably much higher in 2022. Why? We protect what is valuable. We protect what we hold dear. We want to safeguard in what we have invested - and rightly so.

The same is true for our God who is *for* us. The Christians in Philippi received some great direction from Paul:

"Don't worry about anything, God's for you! His peace in Christ guards and protects you from doubt and worry." (*my translation*)

Why does God's peace guard us? He protects what is valuable. He protects what He holds dear. He safeguards that in which He has invested. Don't think for a minute that what Christ did on Calvary didn't cost Him everything, and before that His incarnation. To redeem creation from the fall, Christ gave up everything. Now, it is His joy to protect that which He gave up so much to redeem.

Question to Ponder:

What is something that you protect or guard? Why? Be on the lookout today for ways you see Christ's peace guarding you.

December 10th, 2022

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Romans 5:8 (NLT)

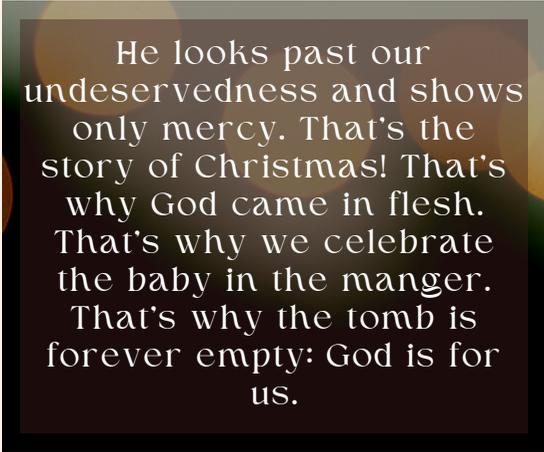
I'm a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals.

Unfortunately, my fandom is sometimes colored by the way they play. From 1988 to 1995, it was very hard to root for the Cardinals: they were terrible. There was really nothing great or exciting about them. They, in my mind, didn't deserve my attention - so I didn't go to a lot of games, didn't watch them much on TV, and I sure wasn't going to buy a jersey! They had to earn my affection! The Good News is that none of that fickle behavior is found with God. He is truly FOR us. In fact, He's so much FOR us that He actually died for us while we were completely undeserving, completely terrible, and a complete mess! This is how God proves that He is FOR us: He looks past our undeservedness and shows only mercy. That's the story of Christmas! That's why God came in flesh.

There's nothing we could ever do to make Him love us any less or more. He is FOR us! That's why we celebrate the baby in the manger. That's why the tomb is forever empty: God is FOR us.

Question to Ponder:

Do you picture God rooting for you? Do picture God overjoyed with you? If not, why? Christmas is just one example of many of how much God is FOR you. Let that sink in today.



He looks past our
undeservedness and shows
only mercy. That's the
story of Christmas! That's
why God came in flesh.
That's why we celebrate
the baby in the manger.
That's why the tomb is
forever empty: God is for
us.

"All things derive from the Word their light and movement and life, as the Gentile authors themselves say, "In Him we live and move and have our being."^{*}

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, "Refutation of the Gentiles"

^{*}Paul quoting Greek poets in Acts 17:28

Week 3 - "God In Us"

Theme: The Peace of Christ

Nativity Narrative: Joseph (Matthew 1)

Main Text: I John 4:12-16

Carol: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

December 11th, 2022

12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. 13 And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

I John 4:12-13 (NLT)

The theme this week centers on two things: the peace of Christ, and God in us. It is sometimes a difficult thing to think about, but the facts are clear: God is in us.

Today in worship we will sing the forgotten verse of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Here it is:

Come, Desire of nations, come!

Fix in us Thy humble home:

Rise, the woman's conqu'ring seed,

Bruise in us the serpent's head;

Adam's likeness now efface,

Stamp Thine image in its place:

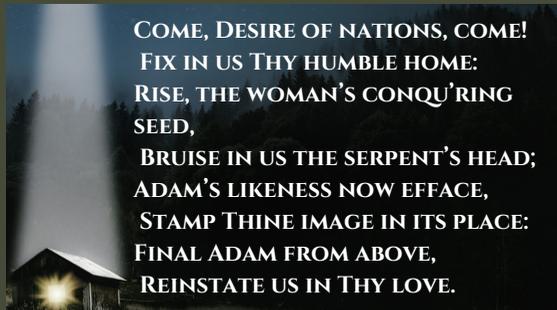
Final Adam from above,

Reinstate us in Thy love.

Taken from Genesis 3, the picture of Christ, the "final Adam," erasing (effacing) Adam's image from us and stamping His on us to reinstate (restore) us in His love is a magnificent picture of what Christmas means on a grand scale: God in us!

Question to Ponder:

Think deeply about the truth that God lives IN you. How does that affect your faith walk with Him?



**COME, DESIRE OF NATIONS, COME!
FIX IN US THY HUMBLE HOME:
RISE, THE WOMAN'S CONQU'RING
SEED,
BRUISE IN US THE SERPENT'S HEAD;
ADAM'S LIKENESS NOW EFFACE,
STAMP THINE IMAGE IN ITS PLACE:
FINAL ADAM FROM ABOVE,
REINSTATE US IN THY LOVE.**

December 12th, 2022

14 Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

I John 4:14-16 (NLT)

After major hurricanes, entire sections of cities become abandoned. Driving through these areas, one will see houses everywhere that are abandoned and falling apart. In some cases, these homes haven't been lived in for 10 years or more. It's really heartbreaking to see.

Living in a home gives it its vibrancy, its heartbeat. Taking residence in something means that it breathes with life, that it pulses with activity. When Christ becomes the source of our True Life, God lives in us. He animates us, He breathes life in us, we pulse with activity. Just as Christ came to live in a human body, now the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. The story of Christmas is of a humble king who came to

live in flesh to die for us. Our personal Christmas story mirrors His: we humble ourselves, die to flesh, so that the King can live in us.

Question to Ponder:

Picture your old self as an abandoned house before Christ. Picture what you look like now that the God of the Universe has breathed life into you - and is living in you. What differences do you see?

December 13th, 2022

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

When someone asks me to share my "life verse," this is usually where I go. If John 3:16 is the scripture that perfectly declares God's love for me before I knew Him, this one perfectly declares how much He loves me now - as one of His. For God to live *in* someone, He has to first make it holy. He won't live where it's not holy, His holiness simply will not do it. So, we crucify our old self and allow Christ's

Christ came to this earth to purify it; not with destruction or condemnation, but with the full measure of God's love poured out through Christ.



righteousness to purify us so that He now lives in us. Christ came to this earth to purify it; not with a sword or with condemnation, but with the full measure of God's love poured out through Christ. He gave Himself for us so that we could give ourselves to Him.

Question to Ponder:

Do you consider yourself "holy?" What do scriptures (like Gal. 2:20) teach us about our holiness?

December 14th, 2022

16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

Ephesians 3:16-17 (NLT)

Have you ever had "one of those days?" It's those kind of days that we sit down on the couch and tell God, "I have no strength left. I'm tired." If we wait for Him to answer (which we sometimes forget to do), we'd hear Him whisper, "I know, cast your cares on me, I care for you." Why can He say that?

He can say that because He knows what it means to be tired. He knows what it means to weary. He knows what it means to fully rely on the strength that comes only from the Spirit. That's another beautiful truth about Christmas: we're known.

God's Spirit empowers us with inner strength because Christ makes His home in our hearts. The familiar weariness of the day, the sadness of loss, the gnawing heartache of betrayal - He's felt them all - and that's why His coming in flesh was important as well. We get to cry out to God in a way that He can sympathize with (Heb. 4:15) - yet being without sin, He can meet it and walk with us in it. That's the joy of Christ *in* us.

Question to Ponder:

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Why can we cast our cares on Him? What do you need to cast?

December 15th, 2022

26 This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. 27 For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

Colossians 1:26-27 (NLT)

When someone tells you a secret, what does that mean? You now have information that no one else has. (Or at least very few)

In some translations of the Bible, the word "mystery" is used for "secret." This is because the word Paul uses is *mystēriou*. A mystery is something that must be discovered, a secret is something that is told. The word Paul used is better translated *secret*: something knowable only through revelation. And just what is that secret? Christ lives in us!

What was once unknowable and unfathomable - is now a central doctrine of our faith: Christ lives in us. Christ isn't some far away deity, He's not an unsympathetic friend, He's not a distant pep-talking coach. Christ is in us. He's feeling what we feel, He's walking through what we walk through, He's suffering right alongside us - yet without sin and marred by the Fall. Let that be another important reminder this Christmas season. Christ's incarnation means that He can feel like we do, yet do it perfectly: just the Savior we need!

Question to Ponder:

What does it mean for you that Christ lives in you?

December 16th, 2022

13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

*14 "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."*

Luke 2:13-14 (NLT)

It's that time of year when you may have already watched the seasonal favorite, "Merry

Christmas, Charlie Brown." The cartoon's seminal moment is when Linus reminds them that the real meaning of Christmas is Jesus. Just before this, everyone has gotten wrapped up in the commercialism of Christmas. Linus lets Luke's nativity take center stage.

Christmas is about the peace that Christ brings. As we look at the phrase, "Christ in Us," we must also remind ourselves that Christ's peace is also alive in our hearts. A lot of the Christmas carols that we sing this time of year speak of the peace brought by Christ. Now, through Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection - we have complete peace between us and God. Christ's righteousness makes a way for peace to reign in our hearts.

Question to Ponder:

Read Luke 2:14. Why is this such a powerful statement about Christ's peace to us. What is going on in your life right now that you need to remind yourself of Christ's peace in you?

December 17th, 2022

26 And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NLT)

This prophecy has been fulfilled. The New Testament scriptures are full of descriptions of our broken sin nature dying and His Spirit living within us.

Just as Christ came into the world, Christ comes into our lives - to take up permanent residence. So when you hear the strains of "Let every heart prepare Him room," let it be more than just making room for Jesus - let it be a complete re-creation. Don't just make room for Him, let Him remove your heart of stone and give you His soft, tender heart which He speaks of in Matthew 11:29.

Question to Ponder:

Read Matthew 11:29. How does Jesus describe His heart? Does His heart match yours?

"The Savior is working mightily among men, every day He is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world, both within and beyond the Greek-speaking world, to accept His faith and be obedient to His teaching. Can anyone, in face of this, still doubt that He has risen and lives, or rather that He is Himself the Life?"

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, "The Resurrection"

Week 4 - "God Through Us"

Theme: The Hope of Christ

Nativity Narrative: Wise Men (Matthew 2:12)

Main Text: Matthew 5:14-16

Carol: "O Holy Night"

December 18th, 2022

14 "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

Christmas is sometimes called the "Season of Light." We put up Christmas lights, we light candles, we have Christmas trees full of twinkling lights adorn our homes - they're everywhere. This week's theme is hope - the hope of Christ. Through Christ's birth, our hope was rekindled. Mankind sat in darkness for a long time. We were marred by the fall, wrecked in our sin, and had no way of getting out of the darkness. But as the familiar strains "O Holy Night" state,

*"Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!"*

A new morning has dawned. Hope has dawned: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world has come to us to live His life through us. We are a city on a hill shining out that hope to the world.

Question to Ponder:

How does Christ shine His light through us? Look for ways He does this as you walk with Him this week.

December 19th, 2022

"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.

He is my chosen one, who pleases me.

I have put my Spirit upon him.

He will bring justice to the nations.

2 *He will not shout*

or raise his voice in public.

3 *He will not crush the weakest reed*

or put out a flickering candle.

He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

4 *He will not falter or lose heart*

until justice prevails throughout the earth.

Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction."

Isaiah 42:1-4 (NLT)

This prophecy of Messianic hope was uttered by Isaiah around 700 years before Christ was born. Can you imagine? 700 years of waiting, watching, and wondering what God would do through His Messiah. Generation after generation waiting for Messiah - through exile, rebuilding, foreign occupation and destruction they desperately wanted a Messiah to destroy their enemies, to bathe his sword in the blood of the oppressors, and to right the wrongs. What they got instead was better than that! A humble and lowly Messiah who came in peace to redeem mankind from all their sin - to right the wrongs they never could. Christmas is about hope.

Question to Ponder:

How has Christ righted the wrongs for you? Let your hope be rekindled this Christmas.

December 20th, 2022

13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

Romans 8:13-15 (NLT)

At its most basic level, the truth of Christ living through us is our commissioning to proclaim Christ's Good News. The truth that God lives with, in, and for us all points to God living through us. He wants us to partner with Him in telling others about how He changes lives,

redeems the lost, and brings hope to the hopeless. That's the point of the Nativity story: lowly shepherds or wealthy wise men - everyone is welcome to take part in the redemption story that God fulfilled through Christ's coming to us.

The Good News is meant to be shared and shouted. I can't help but think of the carol, "Go Tell It on the Mountain," when I read this verse. The last verse of that song declares: "Down in a lowly manger

*Our humble Christ was born
And brought us all salvation
That blessed Christmas morn"*

So, Christian, go tell it on the mountain.

Question to Ponder:

When was the last time you told someone about Christ changing your life?

December 21st, 2022

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Christ's birth wasn't reactive. It wasn't a last-ditch effort to redeem us. It wasn't God's last-minute coup over evil. It was the plan all along - before Adam, before the fall, before

Israel's unfaithfulness, before our first breath. In Revelation 13, Jesus is called the "Lamb who was slaughtered before the world was made." The plan of Christ coming to us in flesh was from eternity. Because of this, the good things that He does in and through us were planned long ago as well. Our joy is to watch Him do them.

So, when you see or think about that baby in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths, adored by the shepherds, while angels "sing sweetly o'er the plains," remember that this baby is the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world.

The incarnation of Christ in flesh, born of a virgin, is vital to His death. His death is vital to His resurrection. His resurrection is vital for living out this "masterpiece" life through us.

When you see or think about that baby in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths, adored by the shepherds, while angels "sing sweetly o'er the plains," remember that this baby is the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world.

Question to Ponder:

How does Christ live this "masterpiece life" through you? How was Jesus' birth, death and resurrection important for Him living through us?

December 22nd, 2022

20 Now may the God of peace—
who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great Shepherd of the sheep,
and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood

21 may he equip you with all you need
for doing his will.
May he produce in you,
through the power of Jesus Christ,
every good thing that is pleasing to him.
All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-21 (NLT)

The Christ-life is all about production. His production of good things *through* you. To do this, He equips you with all you need *for doing His will*. Jesus says that He came to do the will of the Father who sent Him. (John 4 and 6) Christmas is the physical window into that truth. By coming into our world as a man, He shows us what truly doing the will of the Father looks like. We see a true, complete picture of what the Father living His life through mankind is all about.

The carol, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," declares the truth that Christ was born to:
*To save us all from Satan's power,
When we were gone astray."*
We are saved from Satan's power, and we are made alive to God - and through us - He declares New Creation life, equipped to produce every good thing that is pleasing to Him! Glory to God in the highest!

Question to Ponder:
In what areas of your life do you need more "equipping" so He can produce good things through you? Remind yourself that you have been saved from Satan's "power."



December 23rd, 2022
18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"
II Corinthians 5:18-20 (NLT)

Here is the penultimate statement of God living His life *through* us: we are Christ's ambassadors. We are His herald angels, we are His shepherds who went and told everyone what they saw, we are His wise men who came from a distant land to worship at the feet of Jesus and then go away rejoicing.

*"Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn king
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled"*

God has made a way for us to find reconciliation and redemption. Now, it's our mission to tell the Christmas story: Christ became like us, to die for us, to resurrect us, so He can live through us.

Question to Ponder:
What does it mean to you that God "no longer counts sins against us"? How can He do this, and what is our part to play in this truth?

EMMANUEL

I hope this Advent devotional truly blesses you during this time of Christmas. These devotions are meant to be used as a companion to our Sunday morning sermons and worship services. My prayer is that as you walk through this devotional, you also see points in the sermons and music on Sunday morning where it all ties together for a complete and robust celebration of Christ's birth this season.

Please join us each Sunday at 10:45AM at First Baptist Siloam Springs for Advent. It's the perfect time to join us and celebrate Jesus each week.

On Christmas Eve, we also hope you will join us at 5PM for our Christmas Eve service. I know it will be a special time that you won't want to miss! We will also celebrate communion together at 10:45AM on Christmas morning as well. Please join us for a special morning as we celebrate the true reason we are full of hope and joy.

Have a blessed Christmas season,
Pastor Jeremy DeGroot

