

My name is Jeff Fritsche, I am the Lead Pastor of White Rock Fellowship - our church was planted by Fellowship Dallas 12 years ago!

We are part of the Fellowship Family as a daughter church.

But I am also a personal friend of many of the current and past elders and am a personal friend of Kurt and several members of the Fellowship Staff over the years.

I have preached here many times over the years but today is different.

I come to share a message that is always true...but is especially true in the midst of these recent circumstances and the transition that has probably caused a whole host of emotions.

Sadness, confusion, frustration, shock, fear, uncertainty, distraction....

These emotions are all part of the human experience...

Whether those emotions are bubbling up because of the transition here at Fellowship

Or even just the tensions and the pressures of the Christmas season that we are about to walk into...

Or just simply whatever it is in your life that you are bringing in this morning

We know these feelings...

AND all of these emotions are significantly a part of the season that we find ourselves in - Advent.

Though the Christmas Story is familiar to us - if we read it fresh - it is a story full of sadness, confusion, frustration, surprise, fear and uncertainty -

AND yet hope!

Why? Because what is God's gift in the midst of these emotions?

Immanuel - God With Us!

His answer is His Presence!

And His Presence is not dependent upon our circumstances. His Presence is not in crisis.

It is eternal, it is unending, unfailing and it endures forever.

As tempting as it is to think we could calm our fears with our circumstances changing...

As tempting as it is to trust in stability or certainty

As tempting as it is to let our frustrations or sadness or anxiety to take us over...

The answer for all of our life IS and has always been Immanuel - God With Us!

Look at Matthew 1 with me...

Matthew 1:18-23

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Imagine for a minute all that Joseph and Mary felt during this tumultuous time...

Sadness, confusion, frustration, surprise fear, uncertainty....

But notice God was working and active even in the uncertainty.

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **23** "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

Naming was such a significant act in ancient cultures.

Naming in the ancient world was the sign of authority over their child.

And the significance of names were meant to speak into who the child would become and the specific character qualities that they would possess.

We usually just pick names that we like or has a good ring to it. In our case it's tough to find anything that has a good ring to it with the last name Fritsche.

Caroline – my oldest means – joy, or song of happiness - which must be where Neil Diamond got Sweet Caroline! Its a song of happiness. If you have met her – that is very true!

Luke – Or it can sometimes mean "Light giving." Also true of my second child who always wants to bring light to every situation.

And my youngest is named...

Will – which is deepest roots if you do a lot of research - it just means really really really strong WILLED!

Which fits him really well. Maybe we should have thought of that more before we named him that...

Or the good side – resolute protector. Which also kinda fits him! You don't want to mess with him!

The right to name your own child is a privilege given to every parent!

But the Angel doesn't allow Joseph or Mary to name Jesus.

The angel tells Joseph that human life growing inside Mary has not come from any human being but from God.

Matthew 1:23 – it says that the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel – God with us.

For centuries Jewish leaders and scholars had known the prophecy from Isaiah but they had not thought it should be taken literally.

They believed it was predicting the coming of some great leader through whose work, figuratively speaking, God would be present with his people.

But Matthew is saying this promise is greater than anyone imagined. It came true not figuratively but literally.

Jesus Christ is God with us because the human life growing in the womb of Mary was a miracle performed by God himself.

The baby was both fully human and fully God!

This was mind blowing for a Jewish author, Matthew, and Jewish readers.

Everything in the Hebrew worldview was against the idea that a human being could be God.

The divide between humanity and divinity was vast!

This is the miracle of Christmas that...

1. The infinite becoming finite.
2. The creator becoming a single cell.
3. The supernatural becoming natural.
4. Holy becoming something you could touch and hold.
5. God Almighty becoming a fragile baby.
6. God becoming Man

7. God WITH US!

Even though this was so mind-blowing, as we start Advent, what we want to look at today is the sheer fact that

1. "God with us" has always been God's BEST!
2. In Tumultuous Times, God's answer is His Presence

Even in and especially in... tumultuous times, in the fear, in the uncertainty, in the sadness...God is in the business of giving us His Best - His Presence!

From Genesis to Revelation - From Creation to New Heavens, New Earth

From start to finish!

That is what we want to look at today...This theme of Immanuel throughout the Scriptures and why it is God's Best!

If we go all the way back to the beginning - to the origin story.

What did God intend?

Genesis 1:26

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In the Beginning - God's original desire is to be with them.

He creates image bearers of God to fill the earth with His glory and his presence.

We know that in the garden of Eden, God walked with humanity and was with them in a very tangible sense.

God's purpose in creating humanity was to fill the earth with the perfect, holy, glorious, and best gift that could ever be given... Fill the earth with His presence.

But how? Through humanity created in His image.

From the outset of all creation - we were made to have God with us!

The only thing that we need, the only thing that will satisfy us, that which is best!

God's presence!

Now we know the story, sin entered the world.

They are banished from the garden, banished from his Holy presence in the way they knew it before.

And with sin came death.

What is death? Separation from the presence of God!

and yet, God's pursuit of His good presence with us never stops.

If you read the Old Testament with this lens...

You can't miss this theme!

It says over and over again - and God was WITH Noah, God was WITH enoch, God was WITH Abraham.

First with individuals and then an entire nation - Israel.

A people who were blessed by the presence of God to be a blessing to all nations.

God calls them his treasured possession so that He may dwell with them!

He rescues them from slavery...AND promises...

"I will be with you!"

then...

Even in the wandering, even in the unknown, even in the uncertainty, even in the fear of what may come as they wander...

And then he leads them by a cloud by day and fire by night

God is always in the business of giving what is BEST - His presence.

There is this moment where Moses gets the opportunity to go into the promised land - to get the land flowing with milk and honey, to get comfort, success, stability...

But not with God's presence...

Can you imagine? 430 years of slavery - your only hope is to go into this new land flowing with milk and honey!

Moses says - Don't give us the promised land if your presence doesn't go with us!

I don't want milk and honey, I don't want comfort, success, stability - if your presence doesn't go with us!

Soon after...

God tells Joshua be strong and courageous as you fight these uncertain battles going into the promised land.

He says - do not fear, for I am WITH you!

Keep going...

David famously writes - "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil - why? For you are WITH me!"

In Isaiah - in the midst of turmoil - God says - Do not fear or be dismayed for I am with you!

All throughout the Old Testament God desires to be with His people.

Even and especially in the times of fear, sadness, uncertainty, frustration...

So we get to the New Testament...

We see His presence culminating in the gift that we celebrate at Christmas - Jesus - Immanuel. God with us!

God knows that we are broken, we can't save ourselves, we are imperfect before a Perfect and Holy God.

He doesn't send someone else, he doesn't send a committee report or a preacher to tell you how to save yourself.

God HIMSELF comes to save us.

Immanuel!

Notice the other name that that angel told Joseph to name him that day...

Matthew 1:21

21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

The name Jesus is Joshua - Which means - God Saves.

The name is significant.

This baby's name is significant because his name is about what He will Do.

Immanuel – God With Us will be called Jesus – the Savior.

God will save his people from their sins.

What that means is that God didn't just come to earth for a brief time so that we could all see what God was like.

So that we could marvel that we were visited by God that one time in 0 AD!

But He came with a purpose – that purpose was clear.

To save his people from their sins.

His purpose even from before He was born was clear.

He was born to die.

As we sing...

Hark the Herald, Angels Sing "Glory to the newborn King

Peace on Earth and mercy mild, **God and Sinners Reconciled."**

Jesus came to die in our place....So that we could be WITH Him!!

Jesus came to save us FROM our sins... and to save us FOR a purpose!

This is the beauty of these 2 names together....

GODWITHUS came to save us so that we could be reconciled back to God.

God is always in the business of delivering us and giving us what is BEST - His presence.

At the end of Jesus's life, he gathers the disciples and tells them that he is going to leave, he is going to die a criminal's death...

And you can imagine - those same emotions were there - sadness, frustration, fear, uncertainty...

Before Jesus leaves, he makes this mind-blowing statement - He says, it is to you advantage that I go, it is better for me to leave...What? How could it be?

So that The Holy Spirit could be sent.

John 14:16-7

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be WITH you forever,
¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells WITH you and will be IN you.

The indwelling Presence of God is in everyone who believes in Jesus.

If we believe in Jesus Christ - we have the Presence of God indwelling within us!

The Presence of God is never in crisis - it is not dependent upon our circumstances.

He is with us!

These emotions, this uncertainty... it is not wrong to have them - we authentically bring it to God.

Maybe we are asking for **comfort**

God says, I'll do better. I will give you the **Comforter**.

We ask for **help**; He gives us the **Helper**.

We ask for **guidance**; He doesn't necessarily give us a map or instructions, He gives us the **Guide**.

When we ask for **wisdom**, He gives us the **Spirit of Wisdom**.

When we ask for **truth**, He gives us the **truth Teacher**.

We ask for love or joy or peace or patience or kindness or goodness or gentleness or faithfulness or self-control—He gives us the **One who bears all of that fruit in us**.

We ask for **gifts**, He gives us the **Giver**.

We ask for the **supply** and He gives us the **Source**.

This is the beautiful, unbelievable, indescribable generosity of God in the gospel!

This is like us saying, can I borrow \$10 and they give us the bank.

God has given us the resources of heaven **living in us**. What an incredible promise.

We often talk about the blessings of the gospel like forgiveness of sins, eternal life, etc. Those are amazing!

But we often forget that one of the greatest promises and provisions of the gospel of Jesus is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God WITH us

The bible uses words like walk by the Spirit, submit to the spirit, be filled with the Holy Spirit, listen to the Holy Spirit, abide.

These are action words that we use to engage His Presence that is within us.

We seek Him through prayer, confession and repentance, His Word and through other believers' encouragement!

These are always essential, but I want to tell you right now - you must do engage in this.

You must seek Him because the enemy would love to come and distract, destroy and deceive.

The presence of God has not changed. God with Us is still our reality.

And that, no matter what is happening around us...

His unending, eternal, life-giving presence is not only what we need...

IT is amazingly ours in Christ Jesus.

The invitation is LIFE WITH GOD

Do we live in that?

God is with us!

Do we live with that reality like Moses who would say - don't give me anything I want, if your presence doesn't go with me!

Or like David who says - even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death - you are with me.

It is God's Best!

Living in His presence, doesn't change the circumstances necessarily.

The people of God are still wandering

Joshua still has to fight the armies in the Promised Land.

David is still walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Joseph and Mary still have to face a surprise pregnancy and the glares of family members.

But it changes our perspective.

We lit the candle of Peace earlier this morning...

We can actually have peace that surpasses all understanding - because peace is not defined by what is happening around us, but who is in us.

God is always in the business of giving us HIS Best - His Presence!

God With us!

not only is God with us now...

But His presence is our ultimate HOPE!

The task I asked to do today was to see the theme of Immanuel from start to finish in the Bible.

The bible starts with presence, all the way through God is delivering his people so that they can experience His presence.... and it also ends with presence.

Look with me at the end of the story!

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is WITH man. He will dwell WITH them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be WITH them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

This means that this world and all of its trouble, uncertainty, fear, sadness, and frustration is not all there is -

God's BEST will be accomplished fully and ultimately at Jesus' Return!

Our hope is not in other people, it is not in the times, or even in ourselves.

Our hope is in God.

In fact, our hope is God!

What do we need in tumultuous times?

What do we need in uncertainty, sadness, frustration and fear?

We need what we already have been given!

GOD WITH US!

We must receive it, we behold it, we relish it, we submit to it, we trust in it, we engage it!

Today our prayer is like the great Christmas hymn:

“O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray.

Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell

O Come to us, abide WITH us, Our Lord Emmanuel.”

Lets Pray!