

We are taking a break from our study of 2 Corinthians to focus our hearts and minds on Christmas. I'm so glad that even with all of the hard things we've had to deal with this year, we still have Christmas! We need it more than ever!

Let me ask you this: If you could boil Christmas down to just one word, what would it be? Maybe some of you would say joy, peace, or hope. Maybe you'd say family, gifts, or eggnog. For some, this might be a hard time of the year, so you might say loneliness or depression. Since we're a church and know the true meaning of Christmas, I'm sure many of you would say, Jesus.

What I want to suggest to you is something a bit different. I believe the best word to describe Christmas, especially this year, is Immanuel. In fact, if you look at Matthew's account of the first Christmas, you'll see the angel tells Joseph to name the baby Jesus. But then Matthew says this:

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

So his given name was Jesus, but the word that really defined him, the word that really tells us who this child was, is Immanuel.

And Matthew tells us what that means. It means, "God with us." This year, there are so many of us who can't be with the ones we love, and that's especially hard at Christmas. So to hear this single word, Immanuel, which means "God with us," reverberating down through the centuries, is wonderful and astounding.

John Wesley was a famous English pastor, theologian, and evangelist who led a revival movement within the Church of England, called Methodism. On the day he died at age 87, Wesley had already nearly lost his voice and could hardly be understood. But at the last moment, with all the strength he could summon, he suddenly cried out, "The best of all is, God, is with us." Then, raising his hand slightly and waving it in triumph, he shouted again, "The best of all is, God, is with us."

That's what Immanuel means. That's what the birth of Jesus Christ means. Today I want to talk to you about Immanuel, God with us. There are three things I want you to see from this about Jesus.

### **Jesus is GOD**

First of all, this tells us Jesus is God. Again, Immanuel means "God with us." Notice Matthew tells us this was the fulfillment of a prophecy made years earlier by the prophet Isaiah. Jewish leaders and scholars knew all about this prophecy, but they didn't take it literally. They believed Isaiah was predicting the coming of some great leader, and through that leader's work, God would, figuratively speaking, be with his people.

But Matthew is saying this promise points to something far more. If Jesus is God with us, that means the human life growing in Mary's womb was indeed the Creator of the universe. And it wasn't just Matthew who said this; it's the consistent witness of every New Testament writer.

The apostle John wrote,

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. John 1:1-3**

And then, a few verses later, just to make sure we know who he was talking about, he writes, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*" (John 1:14a). That's why the apostle Paul could write, "*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" (Col. 2:9a).

And then there was the apostle Peter. He addresses his second letter, "*To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:*" (2 Peter 1:1). Jesus Christ is both our God and Savior! The amazing thing is Peter lived with Jesus day and night for three years, and he still said Jesus was God. Can you imagine? When you live with someone, you see their flaws. You see what they're like not just in public, but in private. Yet Peter said of Jesus, "*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth*" (1 Peter 2:22).

Of course, their opinion wouldn't matter much if Jesus didn't claim the same thing. But all through the four gospel accounts of his life, he does things and says things that show us he was very aware of his divine identity. He forgives sin. You can only forgive something if it was done to you. If someone hits you in the mouth, and I say to that person, "I forgive you," what good is that? Only you can forgive that person for hitting you in the mouth. Sin is against God, so only God can forgive sin. Yet Jesus went around saying to people, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Matt. 9:2).

Everyone knew what that meant, and that's why when people heard it, they accused him of blasphemy.

Throughout the Bible, the Jewish people were adamant that one could worship no one but God, and there's only one God. That is the first of the Ten Commandments. In the Old Testament, when angels showed up to people, they were so glorious that people would bow down to them. But they wouldn't allow it because you only bow before God; you only worship him. Yet consider this: When Thomas bowed down before Jesus and said to him, "*My Lord and my God*" (*John 20:28*), Jesus said nothing. It's like, "Yeah, that's right. I am your Lord and your God. You should worship me."

Read the four Gospels. Jesus himself said to know him was to know God; to see him was to see God; to believe in him was to believe in God; to receive him was to receive God; to hate him was to hate God, and to honor him was to honor God. Jesus even went so far as to say he'll be the One we face at the final judgment, and we'll be judged based on how we've responded to Him (*Matt 25:31-46*).

By the way, this explains the rather frustrating exclusivity of the Christian faith. There's no other religion on earth that makes such exclusive claims. Other religions say, "Our leader was a great prophet or teacher." Or they might say he had something of the divine essence within him, but no one says this. No one says, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (*John 14:6*). That is just so limiting and restrictive. How can he make that kind of exclusive claim? But, make no mistake, that's what Jesus did, and that's what Christians have always believed: Jesus is God.

### **Jesus is God WITH us (a man)**

But not only is Jesus God, he's also God WITH us. Let's talk about the with-ness of God. The astounding truth of Christmas is the Almighty God, the Everlasting Creator of the universe, the Omniscient One, has come to be WITH us. "The God Most High has become the God Most nigh" (Batterson). He's come near to us.

Now for the Jewish people, to have God come near was absolutely terrifying! I mean, whenever God showed up in the Old Testament, it was frightening. The prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of God on his throne, and he said, "*Woe to me... I am ruined!*" (*Is. 6:5*). No one knew this better than Moses. When Moses went up to Mt Sinai where God was, God told him, "Build a barrier around this mountain, because if anyone touches it, they'll die." "*there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain...everyone in the camp trembled.*" (*Ex. 19:16*). God later told Moses, "*You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live*" (*Ex. 33:20*).

And so perhaps the most startling claim in all the Bible is this God came to be with us not just as a man but as a baby! I have

this new little granddaughter, Olivia, who I'm smitten over. She's so beautiful. But, oh my gosh, she's so fragile. A newborn baby is the very definition of vulnerability, even helplessness. She's completely and utterly dependent. And to think, Almighty God, in coming near to us, became one of us—not as a human glowing with the glory of God; not as a human surrounded with a legion of angels singing the Hallelujah Chorus; not as a human who didn't leave footprints wherever he walked; but as a human who went through all that we go through. He ate and drank, had to use the bathroom, needed rest, got thirsty, cried, bathed, got splinters and a runny nose, and as a teenager, got embarrassed when his dad told corny jokes. He was a baby, who became a toddler, who became a young boy, became an adolescent, became a young man, and died at age 33. And through it all, he was God WITH us.

Let me tell you if Moses or Isaiah had heard me say this they'd have laughed in my face! God WITH us, as a man, as a baby even? How could that be? But let me tell you something theologians have been saying for centuries—it's only because Jesus was fully God and fully man that he could bridge the massive gap between the two. When Jesus arrived, he was on a mission. Over and over again he said the Father sent him into this world not to judge people but to save people. But there was a problem. God is holy, but people are fallen and sinful. The Bible says, "*For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (*Rom. 3:23*). And this sin creates alienation and separation from God.

How can the two be reconciled? For the work of reconciliation to be accomplished, two things had to happen. First, there needed to be a death. The Bible says, "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (*Heb. 9:22*). This shedding of blood was necessary to satisfy the justice of God. But who could satisfy that justice? There needed to be a mediator, someone to reconcile God and man through his death. That person had to fully represent the human race but also be fully acceptable to God. Enter Jesus. The Bible states, "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,*" (*1 Tim. 2:5*). Because he is fully God and fully man, Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the mediator between the two. He had to be fully God so he could satisfy God's wrath and secure for us true righteousness and life. He had to be a man so he could identify with us, suffering on the cross in our place, and sympathize with us in our weakness. Jesus is Immanuel, God WITH us so that we can be WITH him forever.

### **Jesus is God With US**

Jesus is God. Jesus is God WITH us. But here's the last thing and maybe the best—Jesus is also God with US. Interestingly, it doesn't say God is with everyone. He was just with us. Who's the us? Well, start with the Christmas story. Look at who the us was in the Christmas story. It was two poor peasants from a

small village called Nazareth—Joseph, a carpenter, and his young bride, Mary.

The us was also a bunch of shepherds tending their flocks by night. There's a lot of debate about the shepherds. Some say they were among the lowest and most despised social groups. Others say they were actually priests tending the sacrificial animals for the temple. But I think the best way to see them is simply as "average Joes." They were blue-collar guys doing their job.

And then there were the Magi or what we like to call "the Wise Men." They were men who studied the stars. They were seekers of truth. They were also gentiles from a faraway place. They remind us of what John later wrote,

**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12**

All the different figures in the Christmas story serve to remind us that the us are ordinary people from all walks of life who are open and humble enough to see him as the Savior of the world and the Savior they need to heal their broken lives.

And that was true throughout his life on earth. The us he came to be with were those who were open and humble enough to receive him as Immanuel, God with us, the One who came to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God.

That was true of Peter, who once bowed before Jesus and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." It was true of the Samaritan woman who said to her friends, "*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did*" (John 4:29). It was true of the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross and declared, "Surely this man was the Son of God." And it's been true of countless average Joe's and Julie's throughout history who've been open enough and humble enough to confess he's Immanuel, God with us.

So what do you do with this? Let me suggest two things with each one directed to a different audience. First, to those who already consider themselves a Christian and believe everything I just told you about Jesus. You believe the God of all glory, the Creator of the universe, the Alpha and the Omega, laid aside his glory, restrained his own power, accepted hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice, and misunderstanding; and finally suffered a death that involved such agony of body and spirit his mind nearly broke under the prospect of it. You believe he chose to love those least deserving of his love and to die for those who considered him an enemy so they might become his friends.

If any single thing can truly describe the Christmas spirit, it's that. So how can we be like him? Before the apostle Paul described the self-emptying of Jesus, he said this, "*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5). Do you have that mindset? Are you willing to impose on

yourself limitations so that others might be helped? J.I. Packer put it like this: "For the Christmas spirit is the spirit of those who, like their Master, live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor, spending and being spent, to enrich their fellow men, giving time, trouble, care, and concern to do good to others, and not just their own friends, in whatever way there seems need."

Secondly, if you're one who has not yet fully embraced Jesus Christ as Immanuel, God with us, let me assume for a moment you're at least open to the idea. I doubt you would have made it this far into this message if you weren't. You might even consider yourself something of a Christian, but deep down, you know you've yet to really put everything on the line to follow him. You may have a semblance of belief, but your response to him has been tepid or, at best, polite. Look what God did to be WITH you. Look at the lengths he went to be reconciled to you. Look at the suffering and shame he was willing to experience just to get near to you. If you really believe he did that for you, your tepid response to him should come to an end today.

Let this be the last Christmas where you keep him at a safe distance. Let this be the first Christmas that you turn everything over to him and say to him, "You are my God. I surrender all to you. All that I am; all that I have; all that I plan to do." If you read the Bible, you'll see nobody who ever met Jesus had a tepid or even polite response to him. There were really only three responses to Jesus, and these still hold true today. They either hated him and wanted to kill him, they were terrified of him and wanted to run away, or they were absolutely smitten with him as Immanuel, God with us, and gave their whole lives to him. Maybe it's time for you to do just that.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail,  
please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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