

God with Us!

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-24

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

God the Father chose to bring God the Son into the world in a way that is known all too well for us who have grown up in the church and have been to a Christmas Eve service, been to a children's Christmas play or program, or have even watched a movie or cartoon about the birth of Jesus Christ.

When you read the account of Jesus' birth in the Bible, you find that God chose in addition to Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, wise men, and among the others such as the keeper of the inn that was too full to accommodate an expecting mother, God also chose angels to be part of the good news of Jesus Christ.

While thinking about angels, God reminded me of when I was in 5th grade, and I was given the part of the angel who was to proclaim the good news to the shepherds. And when I got up and spotlights turned to make me shine as bright as possible, since I was supposed to be an angel, there was laughter for at least 10 to 20 seconds. I didn't know what could have been so funny. I hadn't even spoken a word, let alone my first line. And there was nothing funny about my part as the angel. Well, once things calmed down, I said my lines and then got off the stage. When I got the change, I quickly ran to the bathroom and discovered what the creative makeup artists, some of the older girls in the youth group, had done to my face. I couldn't believe my eyes. If you saw my face, you would have agreed with me that I should have been a clown rather than a radiant angel.

Whether you've been in Christmas play or not, whether you've had one of your children in a Christmas play or not, or whether you have even seen a Christmas play of one sort or another or not, God intends for us all to be part of Jesus' story.

Christmas Eve Service is a major part of what we would consider part of Christmas. It is because God has put in our hearts, to partake in celebrating God entering the world to be with us. Yes, God is with us.

When we as Christians are asked why God the Son came into the world, we can do well to remember, in addition to John, chapter 3, verse 16, the meaning of Jesus' name. The angel of

the Lord who appeared to Joseph in a dream told Joseph that he was to “...name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The one who will save his people from their sins was and is the reason that Jesus was born into the world to do. Usually, we simply call Jesus our Savior. And we know why we call him that. However, we would never have been able to call Jesus our Savior and our Lord if he had not chosen to become one of us and be with us.

Because Jesus came into the world, because he lived a perfect and sinless life in order to be the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins, and because he died on the cross and rose from the grave, we now know the joy of God being with us always by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. As individual believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we are given the gift of God’s Holy Spirit living within us. God is always with us because Christ made it possible!

God was with us as Jesus Christ, and after Jesus ascended into heaven, only to return at a time and day no one knows except God the Father, Jesus said he would not leave as orphans. He said we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God.

That is how God is with us all of the time, whether we like it or not at times. And as we are together in the name of Jesus Christ, we know that Jesus said that when two or more of us gather in his name, there is he with us. (Matthew 18:20)

God is most present when we get together like this, when we get together to prayer, to worship, to serve, to deliver food baskets, go on mission trips, collect clothes and food for those in need, and whenever two or more of us get together in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What difference does it make for us as children of God? What real difference does it make that God dwelt among us for a time in the flesh? What real difference does it make in our lives that God is with us now, not only when two or more gather in his name, but also all the time because of very Spirit of God living in each of us as followers of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ told of by prophets, and that he would be called Emmanuel which means “God with us.” We know the answer to what difference does God being with us makes. Sometimes we have to think about it a bit more to remember.

God with us means that we no longer have to live with the fear of death. This does not mean we have pleasant feelings about death or actually look forward to the end of our days on earth. Rather, we do not have to worry about the end being the absolute end. That when we meet our Maker, we will know that Jesus has taken care of the debt of sin that we alone could never pay for. As one who has been given a total loan forgiveness and is thankful until they go into debt again, we have it better that Jesus paid for our sins once and for all.

God with us means that we are empowered to live for God and the love of others, and not only for ourselves. The most miserable lives are those that focus only on themselves and not only refuse to give, but just take and take until they exhaust those around them. God enables us to change that way of life and live for the one who we know as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

God with us means that we are loved for who we are, yet called to be more like Christ day by day. Christ did not call us to follow him whenever we felt like it, when it is convenient, or when it seems like the right time. Christ told us that if we wanted to follow him that we need to daily take up our cross and follow him. Lest you think this means that we do not have God with us if we don't daily take up our cross (and by taking up your cross daily meaning to daily choose to live for him at home, at work, and everywhere you are and with everyone you're with), we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In Romans 8:38-39 we are told "...that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And even in 2 Timothy 2:11-13 we are told, "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."

God with us means something that we often forget...that God chooses us to be the very people God's good news continues to be shared, that others may know God through us and our lives! This makes complete sense when it comes to those we love, those we live with, those we raise, and even those we take care of who used to take of us. God presence is known and experienced in how we love one another. That is one way of loving God, by how we love others.

God with us is not meant to end with family and friends, but this Good News that the shepherds first heard was for, as the angel proclaimed, all people.

Once we were strangers to Christ. Until we decided to follow Christ, we only knew of God. When we decide to follow Christ, God was with us and always will be with us, for eternity.

God with us is why we celebrate tonight. Knowing God is with us allows us to have the hope, peace, joy and love that the various circumstances we face and go through would cause us to totally lose heart and even give up.

God being with us, especially through the presence of the people God has surrounded us with, allows us to be faithful, to be giving, to be loving, and to be one who strives each day to faithfully love God and others.

So tonight we are excited about celebrating the birth of Christ; that salvation has come for us and the world. We are no doubt excited about opening presents as well as seeing those we love opening the presents we got for them. Some of us will find it hard to fall asleep. And some of us will have absolutely no problems falling tonight, actually having waited all week or even all month for the opportunity for a really good night's rest. Some of us are so excited for a break from the normal days of life and work. Just to be with family, to enjoy Christmas Day and the days to follow. At the same time some of us find this time of year more difficult than other

times of the year, and though there are glimpses of celebration, and at the minimum this is a time mixed thoughts and emotions, depending on what has happened or is going on in your life. And some of us even look back and say thank goodness 2020 is almost over.

In light of where each of us is in life, we are to remember that Jesus Christ was the gift of God to the world, it is Jesus' birthday we celebrate, and that because of Jesus Christ, God is with us. And that good news gives us God's hope, God's peace, God's joy, and God's love.

With Christ, death was defeated, sin was paid for, lives were restored, and we are given a new day each day.

Knowing God with us is sometimes most evident when you are feeling most alone. And that feeling of being alone can be when you are actually physically with other people or when you are by yourself. God is with you. At the same time, you can also feel God so close to you when there is someone walking beside you on life's journey, whether it's at the best of times or the times in which we are told feel the like the valley of the shadow of death.

God with us, I'd like to end, is described so beautifully when Jesus tells us that he is our shepherd and we are his sheep. Whether we are close or far from him in our walk, he is always near to us and even carrying us when we wonder where he is.

Knowing God is with us allows for God's love and saving grace to shine through us. This is one of the reasons we light candles on Christmas Eve. As we praise our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, we pass the light symbolizing that each of us are to allow Christ to shine through us, to all, especially those who have yet to really know that God is truly with us. Amen.