

12/24/2018 (12/4/09)

“Immanuel – God Is With Us”

Scripture: Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 7:14; Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve

Matthew 1:22-23 (NIV)

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”).

So, how are you tonight?

Decorations are up (though still not many at our house). We’re still missing a box from our move over the summer. But, that’s OK. We’ll still enjoy Christmas.

Perhaps, you have some presents still to wrap. Maybe, you couldn’t find or afford everything on your list this year.

And now that the shopping is all (or perhaps almost all) done, cooking preparations are likely underway.

Hopefully your nerves are still intact. And, I’m sure many of us still have things to do. I know I do.

So, why do we come into this place? Why are so many others gathered in churches far and wide, from Bethlehem to Budapest, from Alaska to Armenia, each in their own time zone?

We come together again this Christmas Eve with others around the world to remember and rejoice in the true meaning of this Season and this Holy Night.

As Matthew asserts in his gospel account (1:22-23 NIV), “*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet (Isaiah 7:14): ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means ‘God with us.’*” Or, as the NRSV has it, “*God is with us.*”

So, what does that mean to each of us?

Joanie Shawhan of Wisconsin shared her witness with others in today’s devotional reading from *The Upper Room*. She writes:

“My Christmas preparations had come to a grinding halt. Chemotherapy interrupted my annual sprint through holiday activities. Instead of sending family and friends my usual Christmas letter, brimming with cheerful stories about children and pets, I announced that I had been diagnosed with cancer.

“That year, I decorated sparsely. A simple hand-painted nativity set graced my fireplace mantel. Multi-colored lights surrounded the figurines. Cancer surgery had prevented me from traveling during the Thanksgiving holiday, so I looked forward to visiting family for Christmas once I finished the next round of chemotherapy.

“As I sat in my childhood church on Christmas Eve, flames from the candles danced to the joyous music of Christmas carols echoing throughout the room. The light filled the church. I realized a light had shone in the darkness for me just as it had for the shepherds on the first Christmas night.

“Despite my grappling with the unfamiliar world of cancer and chemotherapy, one thing hadn’t changed: God sent us Jesus — Immanuel — as a baby born in a manger. Because Immanuel means ‘God with us,’ I knew then that God was still with me.”

By the birth of Jesus Christ, we realize that God is with us; and not only with us, but for us.

As the late Rev. Billy Graham is quoted from *Hope for Each Day*:

“I never come to Christmas without thinking of the thousands of people who are lonely and troubled at this time of year. I have had psychiatrists tell me their schedules are overloaded with people who find the Christmas season almost more than they can bear because of their loneliness and isolation.

“Christmas is God’s reminder that we are not alone. God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus a reconciling love that rescues us from separation and loneliness. We are not alone; God has come down from Heaven to tell us He loves us!

“At this Christmas season you can be assured that Jesus Christ is here. He is here to give us hope, to forgive our sins, to give us a new song, to impart faith, and to heal our spiritual wounds if only we will let Him.

“The Christmas message has not changed after two thousand years. Christmas still reminds us that God is with us. If you are lonely this Christmas, welcome Christ into your life. Then ask Him to help you reach out to someone else who is lonely, and show that person His love.”

(Jesus, the Light of the World; Thomas Nelson Pub., 2009, p.10)

Even if we do not feel fully prepared with bows and lights and tinsel or presents under the tree, we can remember and celebrate the greatest event and gift of all. God has come in Jesus Christ; Immanuel – God with us! Christ has brought salvation, hope and peace to those who received him. And, God’s love and salvation is for all who would receive him still.

But, let us remember that the fulfillment of God’s promise over 2000 years ago was only the beginning.

Because Jesus died and rose to life again, God is still with us.

Because God sent the Holy Spirit, God is with us, is still with us.

And because God is still with us, we can have and share God's love, hope, joy and peace – not just once a year, but all through the year.

So, remember that God is with you and for you . . .

- . . .in times of ease and prosperity.
- . . .in times of hardship and need.
- . . .in times of gladness and comfort.
- . . .in times of sorrow and pain.
- . . .At home, at work, in school or in your travels. . .

Remember that God is with us . . . with you, in all times and places!

Let us remember that God came most profoundly into this world . . . not in the luxury of a palace or in the power of an emperor or king . . . not in the ornate and beautiful surroundings of a temple or cathedral that may easily inspire us.

The Savior, the Christ Child, came as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes where simple sheep were kept, along the hillside of a small town. He was born of faith, hope and love to those who waited and believed in his coming . . . to those who would love and care for him.

Remember. Remember that God is with us. . . with you. . . as you invite and welcome his presence, his word, his gift of grace, into your heart and into your life – not just this night and tomorrow, but every night, every day, and every tomorrow.

Christ will give you hope and strength to live in his way, guided by his light, renewed by his Spirit.

Whatever challenges you face – God is with you!

Whatever need you have – God is with you!

Trust in God's goodness and grace. Join us into the new year further discovering where and how God is leading you. Join with others here at Chesapeake City Charge in learning and living Christ's way of abundant life. Live by the power of the Holy Spirit given to you.

And may each of us be instruments and channels of God's presence and blessings to others!