



See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."

-Matthew 1:23 CSB-

It's that time of year again! All of our senses are stimulated as we see the lights and decorations, taste the fresh baked goodies gifted by friends, and hear songs of good cheer and joy play through the speakers of restaurants, shops, and homes. It's a time of year that everyone seems to try and be in the Christmas spirit and be filled with joy.

It's so easy to be distracted by the hustle and bustle of the holiday season that we need to take a moment to stop to appreciate what Christmas is all about.

So tune your senses so you can see around the inflatable lawn Santas, snowmen, and elves. Enjoy the songs of reindeers with red noses, snowmen that are frosty, and a large man laughing all the way, but know there is so much more.

For me it's a song sung in a minor key during the advent season that helps me rightly focus on what's really important. It's *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, a song about God being with us. In this song we are reminded of the the magnificent high point in God's story: when God's own Son took on flesh and blood and came into the world to be with us.

We celebrate this event every year, but have you ever stopped to think about how amazing it is that a central part of the good news is that God the Son humbled himself in order to come to be with us? This is amazing and yet so simple!

While this scripture from the Gospel of Matthew, quoting from Isaiah, is usually associated with Christmas, "*God with us*" is actually central to God's story. The story begins with God creating, and in the garden, He is with us (Adam and Eve) in a special way. This intimate fellowship with God was broken by sin and treason as we listened to the serpent and his lies.

*But God immediately sets to work to repair the breach,
promising a Son who will crush the enemy and repair the breach ~Genesis 3:15~*

As the story unfolds, we again see God working to restore fellowship with His people. He delivers them from their slavery in Egypt and leads them into a promised land. A land where there will be a temple. A temple where He can again be with us.

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As special and blessed as this land and temple was, again, we rebelled. But God was not finished with us. He had plans for a better temple. A temple where He could be even more fully with us.

So the Jews replied to him, "What sign will you show us for doing these things?"

Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days."

Therefore the Jews said, "This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?"

~John 2:18-19~

But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

"Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them.

They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God." - Revelation 21:3


God's greatest gift to us is to be with us.

You see, this isn't just a holiday theme. God is always with us and this is why relational restoration is the key for the men and women in our discipleship program. They grow in their knowledge of God, knowing that He is always with them, in good times and bad, in times of abundance and in times of want. He will never leave them nor abandon them.

"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Hebrews 13:6

Without knowing that God is with us, the way we see ourselves and how we relate to others will be skewed, and the way we see creation is utterly catastrophic.

But when we know God is with us, the holiday season isn't merely jolly, we can't help but rejoice!

MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU
AND YOUR FAMILY THIS
ADVENT SEASON!


GIFTS FROM THE HEART

In honor of our Lord Jesus Christ
by Ken & Diane Capp

In honor of Donnie Frazier
by Twila Hunt

In honor of Johnny McIntyre
by John & Debra Russell

In honor of Don Oberlander
by Melody Stevens

In honor of Lorinda Parks
by John & Debra Russell

In honor of Donald Schmidt
by Cheryl Schmidt

In memory of Jerry Armstrong
by Mary Armstrong

In memory of Harry Belau
by Betty Hunter

In memory of Earl Best
by Nickolas & Lindsay Boosalis

In memory of Benjamin Brackin, Jr.
by Benjamin & Geraldine Brackin, Sr.

In memory of Brice Brandt
by Frances Brandt

In memory of Ted Brown
by Joyce Brown

In memory of My Brother Bruce
by Lynn Baker

In memory of Jami Anne Burk
by Roberta Hawkins

In memory of Jerry Burns
by Sharon Burns

In memory of James Estep
by Vivian Estep

In memory of Max Froome
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In memory of Rochelle Roby Frymire
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In memory of Estelle George
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Thank you for equipping us to restore lives in our community!