



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Christmas Day**

**December 25, 2016**

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### **“God With Us”**

*(Matthew 1:23)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God  
with us)” (Mt. 1:23).*

**Collect of the Day:** Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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Immanuel: “God with us.” The Creator, the King of the universe, the One who flung the stars into space and stirred them into galaxies, that One has become a human being.

Nothing about the Christian faith makes any sense until we understand Jesus is God. And scripture tells us this all over the place. Right away, here in the first chapter of Matthew, name him Immanuel, which means “God with us.” And in the first chapter of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

In Acts 20, Paul says “God purchased the church with his own blood.”

In Matthew 9, Jesus forgave a man his sins. The Pharisees didn’t like that at all, because only God can forgive sins. To understand their rationale, think of it this way. All sin and every sin is ultimately a sin against God and his commandments. Jim punches Joe in the nose. Joe can forgive Jim, and the only other one who can forgive Jim is God, because all sins are ultimately against God. So when Jesus forgives the man his sins, the Pharisees knew exactly the claim Jesus was making.

Jesus is God. It’s all over the place in Scripture. When angels show up, people always hit the deck because of their power and glory. Some are even tempted to worship the angels. In Revelation 19 an angel shows up, and the author says, “I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant . . . Worship God only.’” I’m a creature. You should worship only the Creator. But remember when Thomas fell down at

the feet of Jesus and cried, “My Lord and my God!” What does Jesus do? He doesn’t say, “No, no. Don’t do that Thomas. You must worship God alone.” No, Jesus stands there and accepts it. He receives it for he’s God with us. “There was never a time when he was not.” He claimed it. His followers believed it too.

Realize, the very last people on earth who could possibly believe that a human being could be God were first century Jews. All their life, and for thousands of years, it was drilled into the Jewish mindset, never, ever worship anything that is created. Never worship the sun or moon or stars. Never think of God within the ocean or a mountain or a tree. And never, ever worship a man! The last people to believe a man could be God were first century Jews, and yet thousands of them became convinced that he was/is “God with Us”. Even his own brothers were convinced of it.

If as a young man in my thirties I had started going around telling others I was god, I’m pretty sure my two brothers would have had something to say about that. The two brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, who grew up with him, who knew him better than just about anyone. . . they believed it, and became important and influential leaders of the Christian church.

Similarly, there are people today who become our heroes. Athletes, celebrities and so on. But then one of their family members will write a tell-all book about what they’re really like, and the whole hero worship thing goes out the window. Those who worship and adore Elvis never lived with him. But those who did live with Jesus, his family and disciples, they knew that in Jesus, God was with them. They saw his miracles and there was no explaining them away. They heard his teaching, and it convinced them further. They watched how he slipped the traps of the religious authorities, and made it look so easy. Along with thousands of other early followers, they saw a transcendent greatness and glory that was consistent with the claim, a tenderness and power combined with truth and wisdom and love. He cannot be a great teacher only. He’s not a liar. And clearly

he's not crazy. Insane as it sounds to some, all other alternatives are even more insane. This Jesus is "God with us."

All other religions in one way or another say our founder is a great teacher, and he will teach you how to get to God. He will teach you how to live in such a way that you'll get to heaven. Christianity on the other hands says your morality and goodness will never be enough. And I think most of us have been around long enough to realize that, right? Don't you know by now your efforts to be moral and good always, always fall short? You don't just need more instruction, and you don't need just another teacher. You need a Savior. You need God's Son to come down and live and die for you in such a way that saves you from your sin. And Jesus is that one.

God with us. If this claim is true, everything else about Christianity makes sense. Then the miracles make sense. The exclusive claims make sense. The need not just for good works but for complete rest and trust in Jesus as Savior makes sense.

So first, Christmas means he's God with us. Second, Christmas means he's God with us. This all powerful, all knowing God has initiated an intimate and personal relationship with us.

Before Jesus, whenever the presence of God comes near to man it was absolutely terrifying. To his ancient people in the wilderness God manifested himself in a pillar of fire, or lightening and smoke and a quaking mountain. When Moses asks to see him personally, God said "No, but I'll tuck you into a cleft in the rock and will pass by and let you see my backside", whatever that means. You recall afterwards Moses' face was so bright the people couldn't handle it. He had to put a veil over it for a period of time. . . It's one thing to sense the presence of God today, for example, in the pounding surf of the ocean. It's quite another to actually be in God's holy presence. Before Jesus, being in God's presence was terrifying.

But God coming to us as a baby? This time it wasn't

Moses who put a veil over his face. This time it was God. Jesus took the terror out of meeting God. Jesus made God approachable. And any God who comes to us as a baby wants to be approached. There's nothing like a baby. You can pick them up and hold them in your arms. You can kiss them. They're completely open, vulnerable. Before Christmas, God was in the whirlwind, in the lightening, in the pillar of fire, in the earth quake. But now at Christmas God is with us as a baby.

If Moses were here today and heard our Gospel lesson, he would be jumping up and down in excitement. "Do you realize what this means? This was the very thing I was denied. You can meet God. He's come into your life and has taken away your sin, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14) that separates us from God. He's taken all that away.

Jesus told us himself, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." So there's not multiple routes to heaven. There's just one. His name is Jesus. "But that sounds so exclusive" you say. Think of it this way. Say you're on the thirteenth floor of a burning building. All the stairwells are full of smoke and fire, but someone says, "I've found a way out! This stairwell is open and clear!" Are you going to say, "Only one way? But that's not fair!" No! You're going to use that one way and you're going to be thankful for it.

Finally, God with Us. Whose the us? Who does God come to be with? The angel of the Lord has already told us. "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." That little word "all" packs a powerful load of grace, doesn't it. It means whoever you are, this Savior is for you. Whatever you've done, this Savior is for you. No one is left out. No sin is too big or grievous. His sacrifice on the cross is sufficient for all sin. 1 John 1, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So no one is a lost cause. 1 Timothy 1, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners – of whom I am the worst.” And in 1 Timothy 2, “God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Again, no exceptions.

“God with us.” The “us” means also you, you singular, you as an individual. In Christ Jesus, God is with you. It means God doesn’t hate you for your sin but loves you in spite of it. “God with us” means he’s not looking for a way to shrink from his promises. No he will stretch them to their breaking point and always does at least as much as he has promised. “God with us.” Particularly in Holy Baptism God takes his love for the world, and funnels and focuses it right on you as an individual and says essentially, “I am with you . . . every step of the way, through thick and thin, in sin and in righteousness. You won’t be able to scare me away with your sin. Even if you turn your back on me, I will not turn my back on you.”

Finally, I end with a challenge. If Jesus truly is God with us, a lukewarm and tepid response to him is just not rational. As I said last night, no one who ever knew Jesus had a moderate response to him. Love him or hate him, reject him or worship him, there’s something about him and his claim to be God that compels a resolute answer.

As you consider that, consider also what God has done to be with you! Look at the manger and see how far he is willing to go to save you. Look at the manger and at the cross and see how much he loves you and what he is willing to do to be near you.

What I want to know is what are you doing to be near him? If there’s an uncomfortable gap there, a distance that just isn’t right, what are you doing about it? What are you willing to do about it? What’s keeping you? Habit? Lack of discipline? Too busy, too pressed down by other things? Not enough time?

Whatever it costs you (another hour or two a week) it’s nothing, nothing compared to what it cost him to be with you. What are your obstacles to a closer relationship with him? Claw your way through anything that’s keeping you from him because he clawed his way through heaven and

earth to be near you. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

He’s God. 2. He’s God with us. 3. He’s God with you. Thanks be to God!

