



God With Us – Touchpoint for December 14, 2022

Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSVUE) 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 pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.

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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and his name shall be called ‘Emmanuel’
(which means, ‘God with us’).”

You know, I think we had probably hoped for something more.

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called ‘Emmanuel’ (which means, ‘God with us’).”

Is this all we get from God? God will be with us.

I had always kind of hoped for something more. You know, a God who would be a booster rocket to MY hopes and dreams. A God who would make none of my dreams impossible. A God who would make it such for me that “all things are possible.”

And if I didn't want to speak of my earthly dreams, how about my spiritual goals? I was kind of hoping for a God that, in the words of recent song I heard:

“... would lead me to such holiness... that mortal words could not express.”

Or in the words of one of my favorite hymns, a God who would so inspire me that I would “love to tell the story of unseen things above.” Now, I never quite figured out how you can tell a story of ‘unseen things,’ but it sure set my heart atwitter to sing it.

But a God who just promises to be with me? Honestly, for that I could get a dog. And frankly, the fact that the dog would be constantly with me would be more of an annoyance than a comfort most of the time.

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called ‘Emmanuel’ (which means, ‘God with us’).”

What do we do with a God whose goal is to be with us? Is this good news or bad news?

I think we have to be honest that we have taken a much more utilitarian view of God. We offer God to people as a good deal, a leg up, an advantage over others who “don't have Him.” But if Jesus is the manifestation of a God who is “with us,” then how can we even talk about those who don't have Him?

And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

Perhaps we thought we were intended for something more. Perhaps we thought we were meant for something more spiritual.

But if God's goal is simply to be “with us,” then what is there for us to do? Where is there for us to go? What progress is there for us to make?

And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

This sentence. This statement. Drives us back down to earth. It grounds us, anchors us in the here and now. This statement crushes our spiritual ambition, for it tells us there is nowhere for us to go, and nothing for us to do, to be with God.

For God has come to be with us.

This shouldn't be a new concept. In the Garden of Eden, God walks amongst the creatures and humans of the earth.

In the Pentecost story, God pours His spirit out upon the disciples here on earth.

In the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem comes out from heaven and sets up here on earth.

This is what “atonement” means. God is **“at-one”** with us in every mo-**“ment”**.

And so atonement is not an act of sacrifice on the cross. It is begun in the manger, where God sacrifices Himself as a God of transcendence and power, to become a God of immanence and the powerless. A vulnerable baby.

God has always come to us. And in fact, whenever we have tried to come up to God's level, God has brought us back down to earth... saved us from ourselves.

Think of the Garden of Eden, or the Tower of Babel, where God struck down our lofty ladder climbing.

This is the sin Jesus saves us from, which is mentioned in the previous verse where Jesus is given the name *“Jesus, because he will save the people from their sin.”*

The sin of trying to do more... be more... achieve more than simply being human.

You know, I find it funny when people say, “I’m only human.” Because my reply is, “What’s the option?”

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St. Paul says it well when he writes:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:38-39 [1]

And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

Richard Rohr writes a great commentary on that Romans passage:

“We are already in union with God! There is an absolute, eternal union between God and ... everything. The problem is that Western religion has not taught us this. Our ego over-emphasizes our individuality and separateness from God and others, and, we limit God’s redemption to the human species—and not very many individuals within that species!

(So)... “You don’t have to worry about your little private, separate, insecure self. I am one with you and you are one with your neighbor and you are one with God. That’s the Gospel!

“You’re not here to save your soul. That’s already been done once and for all—in Christ, through Christ, with Christ, and as Christ (see Ephesians 1:3-14). By God’s love, mercy, and grace, we are already the Body of Christ: the one universal body that has existed since the beginning of time. You and I are here for just a few decades, dancing on the stage of life, perhaps taking our autonomous self far too seriously. That little and clearly imperfect self just cannot believe it could be a child of God. I hope the Gospel frees you to live inside of a life that is larger than you and cannot be taken from you. It is the very life of God which cannot be destroyed.”

So writes Richard Rohr.

And in another place St. Paul says, “God is the one in whom we move and live and have our being.” God isn't just with us, God has subsumed us into Him.

There is no place we have to go. There is no goodness we have to achieve, before God will be with us.

That is what is so powerful about this meal.

“In the night in which he was betrayed...” In the night in which he was denied, fallen asleep on, run away from.

In THAT night he was AT-ONE with Judas, and Peter, James, John and the rest. They didn't have to find, achieve, or earn some goodness before God was with them.

The Holy Week stories of holy communion, crucifixion, and resurrection find their roots, their seed, in the Christmas story.

And so the AT-ONE-MENT is begun in the manger. *“It is finished”* on the cross. God sacrifices Godself to be one with us. This is fully symbolized in holy communion: *“... my body, my blood, broken and shed for you.”* God sacrifices Godself as a “wholly other” to break down and become a “God with us.” The sacrifice of God is begun in the manger.

And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

Why did Jesus have to die? Because he was born. Because he is God with us. In birth, in life, in death. And in the life to come.

Here in this meal, God subsumes us even as we consume Him.

God with us. Us with God.

In birth. In life. In death. And in the life to come.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taize)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior. For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore. How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree. You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Benediction

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.