

God is With Us
Phil. 2:5-11
SERIES “Here”
Jarrett Stephens

I LOVE preaching Christmas and am REALLY excited to begin our Christmas series today.

We’re going to take the next three weeks and talk about what it means that Christ is HERE – and we are going to do this by exploring three truths surrounding the arrival of Jesus into the world. The birth of Jesus...his advent means:

1. God is with us – this is incarnation
2. God is for us – this is salvation
3. God is in us – this is mission

We’re taking a deep dive into Truth #1 today and it is the title of the message: **God is with us**

? - Is there anything better- truly...than the arrival of a newborn baby into the world? Think about all that surrounds it. The joy...the anticipation. From announcing that a baby is “on the way” to your friends and loved ones TO the gender reveals which has become a THING nowadays TO the actual birth of the baby and bringing that baby home...there’s just nothing like the arrival of a baby into the world.

And when I look back to when my girls were born – Now, Debbie likes to highlight that each time one of our children were born that I simultaneously had a medical emergency each time – and that’s partly true.

- At Riley’s birth, I passed out, but I came back fairly quickly though AND that was our first child...
- At the twin’s birth, I had a kidney stone at the same time and had to check in the same hospital and stay just down the hall from Debbie and the twins...
- I was just fine during Kelsey’s birth...so, Debbie is exaggerating a little bit on saying there was a medical emergency with EVERY birth!

Now, while my “medical emergencies” stick out in Debbie’s mind, I think the highlight for me each time was right AFTER they were delivered, being able to go tell my parents and Debbie’s parents who were out in the waiting room, “Hey, Riley is here...Kelsey is here...the twins are here – two more girls, they’re here! – and mom is doing just fine!”

So much joy...so much excitement! There’s NOTHING like making that announcement and sharing that good news. The baby we have been praying for...waiting on...preparing for...is HERE!

THIS is Christmas. It’s the greatest news that would ever be shared – that Jesus is here!

And when this announcement was made, we are told immediately of its significance – that this is NO normal baby that is being born, but instead the baby that Mary would deliver, he would be the son of God.

Matt. 1:21-23 – “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:** ²³ **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive (Isaiah 7:14 – prophesied 700 years before it ever took place) and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”**

Christmas means “God with us”. Now, these three words are PACKED with meaning, and they constitute the very meaning of the word: “Incarnation”.

The word, “incarnate” comes from a Latin word that means “becoming flesh” – i.e. becoming human.

The *New International Bible Dictionary* states: **“The doctrine of the Incarnation teaches that the eternal Son of God became human, and that he did so without in any manner or degree diminishing his divine nature.”**

The apostle, John put it like this in: **John 1:14 – “And the Word (another name for Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

What the incarnation teaches is that Jesus was 100% God AND he was 100% man...and this is both a mystery and a miracle.

Martin Luther – “The mystery of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”

And he’s right. It is impossible to understand in its fullness all the incarnation means and what it entails – it’s a mystery!

It’s so mysterious that as people have tried to explain it and wrap their mind around it, rather than bring understanding, it’s resulted in at least eight major heresies throughout Christian history!

In fact, MOST of the major creeds we have INCLUDING the Nicene Creed 325 AD and an expanded upon version of that creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Chalcedonian Creed in 451, the Athanasian Creed in the 4th and 5th century, the second and third councils of Constantinople (553 and 681) has to do with the issue of attempting to clarify WHO Jesus was as it relates to his humanity and deity – it all goes back to bringing clarity to the incarnation!

The incarnation is as sacred ground as we can stand on. Without the incarnation, there would be no salvation (which were going to cover next week) and there would be no resurrection.

It's a mystery – the eternal God taking on flesh – fully divine and fully human.

I love how the wordsmith, **Max Lucado** puts it: **“The omnipotent, in one instant, made himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierceable. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus.”**

Amazing. The incarnation is “God with us” – it's a mystery...but it's also a miracle.

Charles Spurgeon – **“It is a miracle of miracles that the Infinite should become an infant.”**

Illus. Nativity sets - Look...don't rush past those nativity sets. Whenever you see in art OR in the decorations of a home OR in a performance like Christmas Spectacular the manger...don't rush past it! You are looking at the greatest miracle EVER brought about.

The author, **C.S. Lewis** called it “The Grand Miracle”. Listen to what he writes in his book, *Miracles*:

“The central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation...Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this...It was the central event in the history of the Earth—the very thing that the whole story has been about.”

As one commentator I read put it: “If God could come out of heaven and live an earthly life, surely he could come out of the grave and conquer an earthly death.”

Wow! No wonder Lewis called it the “grand miracle”.

Perhaps the greatest passage we have on the mystery and miracle of the incarnation and what it entails is found in the book of Philippians.

Let's look at it together.

Phil. 2:5-11 – **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

Now, before we move into the practical aspects of how the incarnation affects us on a daily basis, let's just look at what Paul writes here, and I want us to outline three facts that are central to the incarnation.

Fact #1 – Virgin Birth

When we read (v. 6-7), Paul reverts back to the birth of Christ. He points out that while Jesus was God – the NIV translates “in the FORM of God” (v. 6) as “being in the very NATURE of God”.

Paul is highlighting that Jesus was the same as God, the Father in essence...in character...in nature BUT he (v. 7) “emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness/appearance of men.”

Now, a lot of ink has been spilled over what it means that Jesus “emptied himself”.

You can read and study it in your own time, here’s the jest of it. **Wayne Grudem** sums it up nicely in his *Systematic Theology* when he writes: **“The emptying includes change of role and status, not essential attributes or nature.”**

In other words, Jesus in becoming man emptied himself of status and privilege – he was worshipped in glory – he left the confines of heaven where he had existed for all of eternity and left THAT – and came to earth being born in the likeness of man.

Going back to his birth, we read in the scripture how it happened.

Luke 1:31-35- “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

Fact #1 as it relates to the incarnation is the virgin birth. 100% man and 100% God. Fact #2 and 3 - I’m putting these together because they go hand in hand.

Fact #2 – Sinless life

Fact #3 – Sacrificial death

Phil. 2:8 – “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

The deity of Christ (being born of the Holy Spirit and of a virgin) was critical to the “sinlessness of Christ”- that makes sense. Jesus is born, but unlike me and you he does NOT have a sin nature – he’s born of the Holy Spirit. He is God.

See, if there's no incarnation, there's no sinless life. Sin had to be paid for...it had to be dealt with...a sacrifice would have to be made – but in order to appease the wrath of God FINALLY AND FULLY – that sacrifice had to be made with pure blood – it couldn't come from the blood of a bull or a goat or me or you.
And THIS is WHY Jesus came! To save us from our sins!

Gal. 4:4-5 – “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law (Jesus knew we couldn't pay for our sin, so he came to REDEEM us BY his blood Eph. 1:7), so that we might receive adoption as sons (and daughters).”

He was born of a virgin. He lived a sinless life. He died a sacrificial death.

The descent of Christ – from the highest of heavens TO taking on the nature of a servant TO going to the cross – a place reserved for the criminal – it's the most shameful and degrading death one could experience at that moment in history – Jesus goes to the cross at the will of his father, and he dies in our place.

This is the only way it would work...and how could God receive the sacrificial death of Christ? Because of the sinless life that is rooted in the virgin birth!

And...we know he did receive the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf because of the resurrection! That's what (v. 9-11) speaks of in Phil. chapter two – there is the vindication and exaltation of Christ!

There's NO exaltation without incarnation. It all starts with the incarnation – if you've ever wondered WHY Jesus is worthy to be praised...if you've ever had a hard time trying to “get your worship” on – Christmas ought to rev your spiritual engine because it's all about the incarnation which means “God is with us”.

Now, practically speaking...and this is where it gets REALLY good, I want us to look at the Christmas story and discover how the incarnation can help us on a daily basis.

Remember, this is “God with us” – this is THE incarnation. How can it help us? Well, first:

1. It helps alleviate fear

It's amazing how often fear is seen in the Christmas story and in all of these situations what was the answer?

It's what his name means! Immanuel – God with us!

To me, this is the greatest promise in all of the Bible. You can trace it from Genesis to Revelation. God says over and over and over, “I will be WITH you!”

? – I wonder if anyone here this morning in need of that promise?

Joseph sure needed this promise. Scripture tells us in Matthew chapter one that Joseph is troubled. His fiancée is pregnant and he knows that he didn't do it! As little as we know of Joseph, we do know that he seems to be respectable...and he seems to be a man of character and integrity.

According to the scripture he decides to divorce Mary...but he will do it in a way that is quiet and that would not bring embarrassment or shame to her in a public way.

Matt. 1:19 – “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”

Can you imagine the personal turmoil...can you imagine the heartache. Just put yourself in Joseph's sandals...he was at a point of personal crisis!

He didn't know what to do! He needed direction. He needed hope. He needed courage AND encouragement. He is about to leave the one he loves...this is a personal trial if I've ever read of one.

Illus. Trials - You know for some of you, you don't have to work too hard to put yourself in the place of Joseph. 2025 has been a year of personal crisis for you:

- Maybe it's been a job loss or financial downturn...
- Maybe it is a health crisis that you face...
- Maybe it's the death of a loved one...

You're in the middle of a personal trial right now and like Joseph, you don't know what to do. The unknown future is causing fear to grip your heart and not turn loose

What message does God have for you? What message could he possibly send to you to encourage you in this time...to keep you going?

The message he gives to you is the same message he gave to Joseph in a dream. “Take heart! Immanuel – God WITH us is here!”

This was the message that would keep Joseph moving forward at a very dark time in his life and it is this very same message that will keep you going if you need hope and encouragement today!

What hope is in Jesus' name! He is Immanuel...God with us!

When the angel comes to the virgin, Mary to announce that she will give birth to Jesus, there is some fear in Mary. And in **Luke 1:28** (notice his greeting) – **“And he came to her said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.”**

God WITH us means his presence is here! This is one of the greatest gifts God could ever give. Are you hearing me? His greatest present to us is his presence!

Illus. Greatest gift – Grey Skull castle, ropes, ventriloquist doll – greatest gift God gives – his presence.

God with us: Helps alleviate our fears. Listen, it could be God is calling you to do something that is going to stretch your faith...it's our Hebrews series. How do we move forward when what God is calling us to doesn't seem possible? When what he is calling us to causes fear?

We think on the incarnation! "God is with us"! When we do this:

1. It helps alleviate fear
2. **It helps bring comfort**

This is true isn't it? The promise of God's presence...it doesn't just remove the fear, it actually brings comfort and peace...it's crazy!

On the outside, the waves can be rocking the boat, but if Jesus is with you, you know you're going to be just fine. His presence brings comfort.

Again, think of this as it relates to the Christmas story. Simeon is an old man. He's been waiting his whole life the Bible says for the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25) – that's literally the comfort of Israel.

He's in the temple, and when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus in, Simeon, who the Bible calls "righteous and devout" sees the child and picks Jesus up (we'd be calling security if someone did that here! Ha!) and listen to what he prays:

Luke 2:29-32 – "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

The presence of Jesus brought the comfort that Simeon had been looking and trusting the Lord for his entire life.

Listen:

- God is with you in whatever pain you're in...
- He is with you in your loneliness.
- He is with you in your despair...
- He is with you in your depression...
- He is with you in your anxiety...

Illus. Katelyn Brown – This really hit home for me and many on our team this week (tell story). What does the Brown family need MORE than anything? God's presence.

Look to him and be comforted today – this is what the incarnation means on a practical level.

1. It helps alleviate fear.
2. It helps bring comfort.
3. **It helps empower obedience**

After the promise of God's presence...Mary says to Gabriel in:

Luke 1:38 – “And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

Joseph in: **Matt. 1:24-25- “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”**

The Shepherds in: **Luke 2:15-16 – “When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”**

It seems where there is a promise of his presence, people are empowered to obey...when they KNOW God is with them!

Illus. Five years ago this weekend – preached in view of a call. I was SCARED to death to move my family (Element Hotel) – I needed some comfort...what empowered my obedience?

“I’m with you.” THIS is Christmas.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.