**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 12-13-2020
The Wonder of a Promise**

One of the things that is so often associated with Christmas is gifts. People enjoy giving gifts and receiving gifts. There is the wrapping and unwrapping of presents. I personally am much better at the unwrapping. Some people like Kara can wrap presents so nicely.

And I believe that this desire to give all comes from God. God is so generous and giving. In fact, Scripture teaches us that every good and perfect gift comes from Him. It finds its origin in God’s heart.

And one of the best gifts or presents that God offers to people is the gift of His presence. His promise that He is there and He is with them. What better gift is there and his presence? For the LORD is the God who is there. And He promises His presence to His faithful people.

This theme of God’s presence with us is one that runs throughout the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, we read that God desires people to walk with Him and to enjoy fellowship with Him.

In Genesis we read of God walking with Adam and presumably with Eve as well.

We also read of a man named Enoch who walked with God for a very long time and then the Lord simply took Him to heaven. He didn’t pass through death.

And then there was Moses. Moses’ story is just so amazing. God reveals Himself to Him through a burning bush that is somehow not consumed by God’s holy presence.

And the LORD gives Moses instructions to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to free the Israelites.

And Moses has all these excuses. I can’t talk right. No one’s going to listen to me. Why don’t you ask my brother?

Basically, Moses says “who am I?”

And the Lord responds by saying “I will be with you.”

**God promises that His presence is really what is needed**. It wouldn’t be an eloquent tongue or any other human strength. God’s presence is more than enough. And when Moses was preparing to lead Israel towards the Promised Land, God promises His presence would go with you and give you rest.” And Moses says **“If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here?”**

And again, we see this these throughout the Bible. God’s presence with Israel. God’s Spirit coming upon judges and kings and prophets. Apart from God they could do nothing, but God’s presence made them strong and powerful. God’s presence gave them wisdom and understanding.

King David wrote in Psalm 139 – **where can I flee from Your presence. If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are there also.**

This promise of God’s presence should bring comfort to us who follow after Jesus the Christ. While in one sense, God’s presence is inescapable. There is nothing that God does not notice and no evil done in the darkness that will remain hidden.

But for us who follow the way of the God, God’s presence with us is something that we should celebrate.

But today, as we continue to journey towards Christmas together, let us consider another aspect of the wonder of Christmas. The promise of God’s presence with humanity like never before. Please turn with me to Matthew 1:18-23

**18This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-23&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23163a)**]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-23&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23164b)**] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

**20But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-23&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23166c)**] because he will save his people from their sins.”**

**22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”[**[**d**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1%3A18-23&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23168d)**] (which means “God with us”).**

Today, let us consider the promise of God with us in Jesus Christ. The incarnation is such an amazing reality. To think that the God who made us and the God who holds everything in the palm of His hand, came to His people, becoming just as human as his creation.

Last week we highlighted God’s humility in a manger which we celebrate each Christmas. Today, let us stand in awe and wonder of the fact that God Almighty walked amongst us for over thirty years.

He was with humanity in a way that He had never before been with humanity. He put on skin and became as human as you and I are human.

In the Old Testament, we can learn of the character of God through the ways that He interacted with His creation, through the laws that He gave, through His inspired words that He gave to those that wrote the Old Testament.

But in the incarnation of Christ we learn that Jesus desires to be with us. While God is against sin, God is for people. Scripture teaches us that Jesus is just like God the Father. Jesus, God the Son, became as human as you and I. And he walked with people and ate with people.

Do you know that Jesus enjoys spending time with His people?

When Jesus chose his 12 apostles, Mark’s gospel tells us that **“he appointed 12 that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”**

Perhaps you didn’t notice it, but Mark tells that part of the reason that Jesus chose these 12 was that they would be with Him. The God who came to them in Jesus is the God who desired for them to be with Him. Our God desires friendship with people.

We can’t forget that these were Jesus’ closest friends. And we, brothers and sisters, are called to be friends with Christ as well.

And people remember, amazing as it was for Peter and James and John and the others who first followed Jesus --- as amazing as it was for them to appreciate God’s presence with them in Jesus, Jesus was more with Him after He returned to heaven than when we walked with them. Why? Because He came to live within each of them through God the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them that He would be with them always.

So please be encouraged by this. We are invited to the promise of God with us in the same way.

Sometimes we can find ourselves envious of the first followers of Jesus, but God is with us, God is Immanuel to us today and in even more profound way.

And we have the New Testament. (he is with us as we read)

His presence now lives within us. He and the Father and the Holy Spirit can come and make their home within us. This is amazing.

In light of the wonder of the promise of God’s with us – of Immanuel, how are we to respond? I would like for us to consider 5 ways that we can respond to this powerful truth.

First, we are to acknowledge His presence with us everywhere that we go. We are never alone and we are never apart from God. Everywhere we go, Christ is there with us. Everywhere we go, we can talk with Him and we can worship Him. Everywhere we go, it is holy ground, for He is with us and in us.

Second, as we remember His presence with us, let us plan to live holy lives in all that we do. Let us not give any place for sin to mess around with us. May a holy awareness of His presence with us at all times give us strength to resist and flee from any tempting actions.

Christ Himself was tempted in every way, but was without sin. Certainly, even as Christians we are still tempted to sin. But the power of His presence in us will give us strength to give no place for the devil to mess around with us. For we are God’s holy people.

Third, in our pains and struggles in life, we must remember that Christ is with us. He is fully aware of everything that we are going through. He knows what we have been through the pains and struggles in our journey. And He desires for us to invite His healing presence to minister to us in those areas of our soul. Jesus says **“come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden and you will find rest for your soul. Let my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your soul.”** Let us put Jesus’ teaching into practice in those areas of our lives and God promises to bring his healing presence in those areas of our lives.

Fourth, we must remember that we are to bring the presence of Christ with us to others. Each Christian is called to host the presence of God. You are a Temple of the Holy Spirit. We collectively are a Temple of the Holy Spirit. We are privileged to bring the presence of Christ to others. We represent Christ everywhere that we go.

We are his ambassadors, Scripture teaches. It is as if God is making His appeal to others through us.

Your love, Your compassion, Your kindness, Your generosity, Your prayers, Your words, Your example ----- can make a huge difference in the lives of others.

A big thing to remind ourselves often is that we are not on this earth for ourselves, but we are here to be a blessing in the Name of Jesus our Lord.

How do you feel the Lord is calling you to minister to others?

In these more challenging times, our witness is more powerful than ever. Because Christ is with you and in you, we carry the presence of God and the goodness of God to others.

**And fifth and finally, remember that Jesus doesn’t only come to be with you, but He desires for each of us to come and be with him.** Like the first followers of Christ, we are called to enjoy standing time with Him. We bring Him joy when we want to be with him.

Let’s pray.

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The Wonder of Christmas Once You Believer, Anything Is Possible by Ed Robb & Rob Renfroe