

SERMON: December 24, 2018 Christmas Eve PRESENCE  
TEXT: Matthew 1:18-23  
SUBJECT: God has come to be with us.  
THEME: God is with us, no matter what.  
PURPOSE: That we would take comfort that God loves us!  
PIC: Jesus in manger

***“And they shall call His name ‘Emmanuel’ – “God with us”.***

Have you ever really thought about what this means?

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### **The Man and the Birds**

by *Paul Harvey*

The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

*"I'm truly sorry to distress you,"* he told his wife, *"but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve."* He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound...Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud...At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them...He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms...Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me...That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

*"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safe, warm...to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand."*

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – Adeste Fidelis – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas.

And he sank to his knees in the snow.

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When we say, "Emmanuel – God with us", what do we mean?

Do we really believe that God came to earth and became one of us?

I really like that story by Paul Harvey – to become a bird, and to be able to speak bird language, so that I could help the birds to find something that they needed but couldn't see.

Is that what it means to say, "God is with us"?

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The Jews had something distinctive that set their faith apart from all of the other religions on the earth. Most cultures believed that the "gods" only lived in certain areas. For the Greeks, it was the top of Mount Olympus. For the Scandinavians, it was Asgard. For the Persians, it was Mt. Elburz.



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c9/Mount\\_Olympus%2C\\_Greece.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c9/Mount_Olympus%2C_Greece.png)

The other gods stayed put. The god of the Nile stayed by the Nile. The baals of the mountains stayed in the mountains. You wouldn't pray to the god of a hilltop if you weren't at that particular hilltop. What good what it do? They weren't there!

But the Jews had a different concept – their God travelled with them! As we hear from the story of Exodus, God travelled with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the Jews wandered through the wilderness, God was with them!

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From the beginning we have seen that our God wants to be with us. Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden - God wants to be with us. God cares for us and wants to pour out His blessings upon His people!

As we've been learning for the past couple of weeks during our Advent studies, God was not satisfied to stay up in heaven, apart from us. God longs for us! God misses us! God created us to have a loving, sharing relationship with Him – but we have lost that.

Whether we blame Adam and Eve or take responsibility ourselves for the brokenness, the fact remains that we do not have the closeness with God that He designed. Our souls have become fragmented and disjointed; we have lost the intimacy that was intended for us.

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We were designed for intimacy with God and with each other. We were made for connection, community, belonging. But our brokenness keeps us separated.

And God is not satisfied with this. It's our fault – we have broken the relationship, not Him. But God did not say, "Well, you messed it up; now it's up to you to make things right."

***God knows that we cannot fix what we have broken.***

***So God said, "I will fix it."***

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The eternal God, the creator of the universe, the only One who matters, says that He misses us. So, even though it wasn't His fault, God said, "I will pay the price."

"This is what I will do – I will come down to be with My people. I will offer My life for them. I will become one of them, and face all of the loneliness and brokenness and pain of what it means to be a human. Then I will be able to save My people."

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If you think about it, there really was no other way. Jesus is both God and man – both divine and human.

***If Jesus wasn't divine, then He wouldn't have the ability to save us. If Jesus was just human, He could relate, but couldn't save.***

But if Jesus was not human, He couldn't relate to us – and we couldn't relate to Him. Like the birds in the story, we couldn't understand what He was doing. We would be afraid.

But since Jesus was both God and man, He can do both. He understands us, and we can understand Him.

And since only God has the power to forgive sins, Jesus has the power to offer us salvation.

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“Emmanuel – God with us” This is the message of Christmas. We have a God who is not content to sit up in heaven and to watch us struggle helplessly; our God has come to be with us.

I wonder – does the world know this?

Do they know that God loves them? Do the people who are hungry tonight, do those who have no place to sleep, do those who are far from home know that there is a God who cares, and that His people care?

We don't come here to just feel good about ourselves. Jesus did not just come for us, but for the entire world!

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not be lost, but gain eternal life.***

***For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”***

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You and I have been invited by God now to invite others to come know Him. Just as the angels spoke to the shepherds, we can now spread that Good News that God has entered human history.

<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: 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.<sup>19</sup>Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup>But 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. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).