

Today, we celebrate with joy the great event of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. We know the details of his life so well: born of the Virgin Mary in a stable because there was no room in the inn wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger – not a cradle. The outward circumstances are of poverty and anonymity, but they conceal a mystery.

This great mystery would have gone by unnoticed, and unknown had not heaven opened, and the angels come down to sing of Jesus' birth. **Jesus was God's light**, the light for the whole world, and God his Father wanted him to be seen and known by all. And so, he sent the angel to the shepherds tending their sheep in the fields nearby: Listen, I bring you news of great joy today a savior has been born to you...

On Christmas night God gives us a saving message. But most of all God gives us a saving relationship, a relationship he invites us to enter. We are not saved by reading a book or attending a church service. We are saved by entering a relationship.

When we accept Christ into our lives, nothing, not even death, can separate us from God and His love. **"God is with us"** that's what Christmas is about. "God is with us" the great people of faith have always claimed that promise.

- Moses, caught between the Pharaoh and the deep Red Sea in a seemingly hopeless situation, believed that God was with him, and he went forward and trusted God to open a way and He did!
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went into the fiery furnace, into a seemingly hopeless situation, and they trusted God to be with them and He was!
- Little David... stood before Goliath. What chance could a small boy with a slingshot have against this giant of a warrior? But David believed that God was with him, and it made all the difference!

Matthew's Gospel captures the meaning of Christmas, the meaning of the Christ event, the meaning of Jesus in a single word. The word was **Emmanuel**. That's what Jesus is about, "His name shall be called Emmanuel" which means, "God is with us." The impact of that Christmas promise is incredible. When you believe that, when you accept that, when you claim that promise... it will absolutely change your life. **"God is with us."**

We can claim that promise when we are frightened. All of us get frightened or scared sometime. Jesus sensed this and consequently He talked about this quite a lot. The words fear, anxious, troubled, afraid were often in His speech, **"Fear not,"** "Do not be afraid." He spoke words like this often because He saw lots of fears and anxieties in the lives of those He loved.

II. **We can claim that promise when we are lonely.**

There are lots of lonely people in the world who need desperately to hear the good news of Christmas. When we are frightened and when we are lonely, we can claim the Christmas promise of God's presence with us.

III. **we can claim that promise when we are in sorrow.**

It seems like it would be easy to feel the presence of God when we are on top of the world and all the breaks are going our way, but the reverse is true. God is never nearer to us than when we are hurting. There are two reasons for that... First, I think we are more open to God when we are in need; and second, I believe God is like a loving parent who wants especially to be with His children when they are in pain.

Recently someone who was experiencing a very difficult and grievous situation said, "This is so hard to take. Our hearts are broken, but we're going to make it because God is with us as never before. He is with us giving us the strength." An 85-year-old woman with a large family had a crippling stroke. As a result, she was unable to speak, unable to walk, and unable to care for her basic needs. Reluctantly, her children placed her in the care of a nursing home. She was there for 5 years, mostly content. They had no indication that she even knew them when they came for visits. One Christmas season the family was gathered for their family Christmas celebration. They gathered around the piano to sing carols.

After they had sung a couple of Christmas carols, one of the daughters suddenly said, "Let's go get Mom." Two family members drove to the nursing home and brought Mom back to the house. Swiftly they wheeled her to the piano, and they began singing carols again. When they came to Silent Night, they could not believe what happened. Their mother, who had not spoken a word in 5 years, started singing Silent Night along with them. It was amazing.

Everybody was stunned, but they kept on singing. They sang other carols, and she sang them all. Even when she couldn't recognize the faces of her own children, even when she seemed incapable of laughter or tears, the songs of Christmas faith were still alive deep within her spirit. Why? I think it's because each one of us has deep down in our souls -

- An incredible hunger to come home to the good news of Christmas,
- An incredible hunger to come to the manger in our own poverty and weakness,
- An incredible hunger to feel and celebrate the redeeming, forgiving, sustaining love of God,
- An incredible hunger to be in the presence of God...

And that is why Christmas is so special because it reminds us that God is indeed with us. In every circumstance of life, even when we are frightened or lonely or in sorrow, that's the Good News of our Christian faith. God is with us... Love came down at Christmas. Experience the Joy of Christmas today.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.