December 21, 2014

God With Us

Matthew 1:18-25

Pastor Josh Luse

Well, it's here. Finals are done; papers are written. Got some vacation coming this week...a few days away from Christmas. Yes!

Maybe you're like the many stories that get told around this time. I heard of one woman who, in her rush to get through this Christmas season, had a circle of friends that she wanted to get a gift for, and like so many of these different times of the year, it just got crazy and busy. She realized that time was coming up where she wasn't going to be able to do it. She hadn't mailed out her annual Christmas card with their family's picture either, so she was just beside herself. So she thought, "Well, I'll at least run to the store real quick and grab a card that I could send out in the mail." So she did just that. She went to the store, weaved her way in and out of people. Lines were packed. She got to the card aisle and found one that said "Merry Christmas" on the front, and it had a good picture. She picked up the package and quickly got back in line. She went home, slapped some labels on them and stuck them in the mail, and kind of felt a little bit of relief. She had a great Christmas holiday.

It came to New Year's Day, and she was picking up after the parties and found a few extra cards that were left over. As she was putting them away, she decided *maybe I'll actually just look inside this card and see what I sent out.* And as she opens it up, the card read, "This Christmas card is just to say a little gift is on the way." (Laughter) Now I can just imagine her face as she realizes she sent this out to her circle of friends, and now wondering what they're thinking, wondering *when is this gift coming?*

This Advent season is this waiting... *"When is this gift coming?"* Last year about this time we looked at Matthew chapter 1, and a long list of names—the genealogy of Jesus. That gave us this anticipation through the years of this gift that would come. I wanted to pick that back up again with you this morning. So if you have your Bibles, we're going to be in Matthew, Chapter 1. If you don't, you can listen along as I read this morning. We'll start with Matthew 1:18.

> **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.** (*NASB, Matthew 1:18-25)

Would you pray with me this morning?

> *Father, thank You so much for this time of year that just reminds us not only of who You are and what this life is all about, but of this Gift that we've received in You. Father, as we come together this morning, we long for You to speak to us. God, I would just ask that You right now prepare our hearts in a way as we read Your Word that we would be open to listening to You. God, thank You for the privilege of coming together with others in Your presence. We pray this in Your Name. Amen.*

Now like I said before, you can go back in Matthew chapter 1, and you can go through this whole list of names, and you'll find this genealogy leads to this arrival of this person that's coming. In fact, we get to verse 18 and it starts with **Now**, and it's a pretty significant transition from the first part of chapter 1 to the last part of chapter 1. And this **birth** word that is used in verse 18 is kind of interesting as well because it's also found in Matthew 1:1. It's the same word in Greek for both; only in Matthew 1:1 it's translated *genealogy*. So maybe what would be helpful to know is that even our word *Genesis* that we have in the first part of our Bible is taken from the same word. It's this idea of origins. So maybe we could think of it in this way: Verse 1 is giving us a record of the genealogy, and verse 18 is giving us a record of the origins. This is going to go into chapter 2, and it's going to be this idea of the origins of Christ. Now Christ wasn't Jesus' last name; Christ was a title. It means *the anointed One*. What we're realizing here is: something huge has just taken place. A new era has just begun. We'll talk a little bit more about that in just a bit. But as we read on in Matthew 1:18:

> **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.**

Now there's a word in there that we probably need to take a little bit of time to understand. It's amazing to me how words change over the years. If we're talking about dating and marriage, if I were to describe it in this way, would you understand? *"I really, really like this girl, so I begin to woo her, and in wooing her, I'm hoping to woo her into a courtship. And if things go real well, maybe I'll give her my ID bracelet or my class ring. And then maybe we'll get to a point to where we can go steady."*

If you're under twenty-years-old in this room, you are just going, *"What in the world did that guy just say?"* Let me put it in terms for you to translate a little bit: You really like a girl. You wanna hang out with her. You wanna maybe go out and you would really like her to be your babe. And, ultimately, you would just want to be able to change your Facebook relational status and things would be good, right?

We have to remember in this **betrothed** word is an ancient Jewish wedding culture. Their wedding ceremonies look nothing like what we know. So let's get a little grasp on what this betrothal means, okay?

First of all, it would often start the process with families initiating and choosing couples together. Customarily, a lot of times it would be the son's parents that would choose a wife for their son. (Now go ahead and take some time to talk that over with your kids as you get home tonight.) And then from that period they would then go and take their love to the rabbi. They would go and

declare their love to him or to witnesses, and he would bring out this document. They would read through this document and then they would sign it. And this began the whole betrothal process.

This period, then, would last for about a year. They were then officially in this *betrothal*. It was a binding contract. The only way out of it would be through death or through a divorce. But they would not come together at this point. She would go live with her family; he would go have a home and start preparing for one time when he would come and get her and bring her home to complete the marriage.

That in fact is what this is talking about when it says here that they were **betrothed**. But **before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.** Joseph had not yet gone to get her. Now this was way more than an engagement. It was very binding. But at the end of this period, the groom would then go and he would get his bride who was waiting. They would have a procession as he brought her home, and then they would consummate the marriage, and after that there would be this wedding feast—much different than what we understand it to be today. But that's why it also lists Joseph as the husband. They're in a betrothal period, but the marriage is not yet complete.

Now just for a second, put yourself in his shoes. What in the world?! Now, sometimes I hate preaching this kind of stuff at Christmas because you hear all of a sudden this Christmas story and think, *"Oh, I know that one."* Maybe it would be better if we preached this in July because it seems so common, so familiar. You don't think about the situation that he's in because you know the rest of the story. But just for a moment, put yourself in Joseph's situation.

We've just gone through a whole list of names, and it says, "...was the father of…" and "...was the father of…." Then we get to the end, here in verse 16, and it says Jacob was the father of Joseph. It doesn't say he was the father of Jesus. It says "*...the husband of Mary by whom Jesus was born."* Joseph is not the father of Jesus. So all of a sudden, in his mind there are all these flags. I can just imagine her coming down and saying, *"Hey, Joseph, I've got to tell you this: I'm pregnant, and you're not going to believe this, but by the Holy Spirit. I don't understand. The Son of God is in my belly."* Yeah, because that's happened a million times before, right? It kind of sounds like one of those settings where if there's nothing else on TV in the morning, you watch one of those talk shows, and it's: *Whose daddy is it?* It just doesn't make sense. So Joseph, as he's processing through this, decides he has got two options. Custom, for what would be adultery in this betrothal period, would be to stone her. But Joseph loves Mary and he's a righteous man so he thinks about the second option. That would be to go back to the rabbi and pay for the bill of divorce. But this is a small town. It would be embarrassing, because having a child out of wedlock in this culture was a much bigger deal than it is today in our culture. So Joseph is hit with this, and he decides to go with option 2. In verse 19 it says:

> **And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.**

And then it goes on to verse 20:

> **But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."**

Conceived by the Holy Spirit! Now why is this such a big deal? This *is* a big deal! God could have come into the world as Jesus any way that he wanted. Think of it...He's God! He's a very creative God. He could have had Jesus somehow become fully human in heaven with His divinity combined together in one person and get in a spaceship and fly down to earth. He could have! (It would have been kind of weird, but he could have!) He could have had Jesus come down in a giant egg or floating on a cloud with fireworks exploding all over. But had He chosen one of these ways, we would have struggled to believe that Jesus was human, that Jesus could understand what we understand, that Jesus would walk in our shoes, that Jesus could be our representative before God for our punishment and for our sin. It just wouldn't make sense. He could have also used two people. He could have used a Joseph and a Mary, and he could have brought them together—like every other baby that comes into this world. But had He done that, and then Jesus was born and somehow He united His divinity with that humanity, we would have struggled to believe that Jesus was God. So this miraculous way that God brings this about allows us to see the uniting of the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus.

It's also important because it shows that salvation must utterly come from God. There is no way that we can manifest or create a savior. It just won't happen. There's no way that we can, in any effort, develop this savior that we could bring for humanity. But God can, and He does it in a way that we never could. It shows us that also there is no way that we could receive salvation by anything that we do. It's only from God. It shows us that our salvation is by faith in Him alone.

Finally, also it shows us that Jesus' true humanity was without inherited sin. Think of it. Luke 1:35 describes it as the Holy Spirit bringing about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary so the Son of God could be called holy. He was completely human, yet without sin, unlike anyone else that has ever walked this earth, because we all have a sinful nature. It's in our bones; it's in our DNA; it's in our nature. When we think of sin, we often think of sin as Sin (with the S), those things that we try to do to avoid it, or those things that we try to not do. But really sin is what we do because we have a sinful nature.

It's interesting, back in the early 1900's the London Times put up a question to its readers: What's wrong with the world today? They invited readers to respond and write back, so several did. But one of the shortest answers that they got back was from a man named G.K. Chesterton, and this is what he wrote back:

> Dear Sir:
> What's wrong with the world today?
> I am.
> Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton

We all have a sinful nature. So what's the solution? Look at verse 21:

> **"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."**

Now names are a pretty big deal. As we look throughout the Old Testament, names were more than a title. Names were more than just something you were called by. Names had deep meaning. The Old Testament names would be developed to describe the nature of a person.

My wife and I just had a baby a couple months ago, and as we went to name our daughter we were thinking. She had a list; I had a list. We'd come together, and I'd say, "No," or she would say, "No," to mine. And we kinda whittled it down, and chose the one we liked and had some meaning in it, but it was nothing the same as what they did. For instance, just think of some of the names in the Bible. Isaac—Isaac means laughter. If you remember the setting that Isaac was born into, his mother was very old. In fact, when she was told that she would have a son, she laughed about it. So when she did have that son, they named him *laughter*.

Or Esau—Esau means *hairy*—because of his appearance. I'm kind of glad that my parents decided to veer away from this choice of naming. I could just imagine picking teams, and some guy goes, "Uh, yeah, I'll take the hairy guy." I'd go, "Pfft! I've got a name! It's Hairy Luse." I mean this idea is just a little bit more than we do today.

But there's a name that shows up in this verse, and it's **Jesus**, and it's packed full of meaning. It's actually a name that is the Greek form of an Old Testament name. You may have heard it before: Yeshua or Yehoshua or Joshua. All good names, I might add, but very common names—names that were used often. The name Joshua means *the Lord is salvation* or *Yahweh saves*. So to Joseph he says, "You will give him a name, a common name—a name that's packed with meaning, a name that will bring a solution to the brokenness of the world. You will name him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. So we go on to verse 22:

> **Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."** (Vs. 22-23)

These verses seem pretty simple. As we read it, it seems pretty clear. Mary's a virgin. Jesus is her son, Immanuel. But actually the choice of words that are used add some more layers to it, and there are skeptics that would say that what it's quoted from in Isaiah 7:14 has nothing to do with a virgin birth. Matthew, as he's writing, looks at the Hebrew word *almah*, as he looks at the Greek Septuagint, probably to translate into this New Testament writing, which means *maiden* or *young woman*. I'll also add that it can also mean *virgin*, but there is room for variation within that. And then in Matthew 1:23 he uses a corresponding Greek word, *parthenos*, which means one who has never known a man intimately, or a virgin.

Now essentially I believe, as you look through this, that this is probably a prophecy that had a double fulfillment. The first fulfillment was referring to the immediate history or situation that was happening with Ahaz. But then there was a further fulfillment that came through the fulfillment of Christ. And it might be helpful to note that Luke 1:31 is probably also referring to this verse in Isaiah as well.

But the point of the Matthew verse is this: It's not whether or not Mary is a virgin. That's clear through other texts in the Scripture. It's not even that Jesus' name would be Immanuel. The point is that the name Immanuel describes the role that Jesus would bring, and this point is huge! This is something we've got to park on and think about for just a second. *Immanuel—God with us*. This means that Jesus is God, and Jesus is now with us. This new era has begun. Think of Immanuel for a second. It's taken from the Hebrew word עִמָּנוּאֵל, which means *with us* or *along with.* And then it also has this word, *El*, which is the abbreviation for God or Elohim, which is another name for God. *God with Us*, or *the with us God*. But also it's a present word. It's God *is* with us—not that God

may be with us, or God *was* with us, or God one day *will be* with us. It's that God is with us because God has always wanted to be with us.

Think through the Old Testament. Think through the beginning of creation. God dwelt in this beautiful community, this intimate community called the Trinity—so incredible that he wanted to share this. So He creates creation. Out of creation, His most valuable prize is the humans that he creates. He creates them in His image because He wants to be with them. And so He goes and He walks with them and He talks with them, and He shares with them. Then sin enters the world and separates us from God. We were not designed to be separated from God. So God's relentless love from that point on pursues people to bring about restoration, to be back together with us. He shows up first in individuals. The early part of Genesis we see Enoch walked with God. It says that God was with Noah and God was with Abraham, and even in surprising people like Ishmael, Abraham's illegitimate son through his servant Hagar. In fact, Ishmael's descendants grow to be enemies with Abraham's other descendants through Isaac. But in Genesis 1, it describes Ishmael in this way. It says *God was with the lad as he grew up.* And from Isaac, God builds a people that he can be with. He has them build this tabernacle, this tent, where God's presence could appear in a cloud. And God would meet the high priest once a year as the high priest would walk into the Holy of Holies.

Exodus 29:44-46 says this: "I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar." Verse 45 goes on to say, "I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and I will be their God, and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." Throughout the Old Testament and throughout the Bible, God's most frequent promise is *I am with you*.

We can look at John 1:14. It says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." He dwelt among us. This word that means *to put up a tent*. God took on flesh and He moved into the neighborhood to be with us. And Jesus is now here, and this changes everything. This means that we no longer have to be separated from God, because in our sinful nature there is a God that came to earth, lived a perfect life, and He died on a cross to take the punishment for our sins so that we could be with Him. And it's given in a gift of faith. We can have faith to believe that Jesus is God and He died for our sins, and we can receive a relationship and salvation from our sins.

But for those that walk with God in this manner, those that accept that gift, I think another point that's pretty critical to understand is that God is with us and that we do this life *with* God—not *for* God. There is a huge difference in that. Let me explain a little bit what I mean. If I get in a mode where I'm just trying to do things *for* God, I get in the mode where I'm checking things off; there's a disconnection—He's my boss and I'm trying to please Him. It's not this relationship. Just a couple of months ago I realized that I'd kind of gotten into this rhythm. I would meet with God at the beginning of the day. I would kind of go about and do my day, and then at the end of the day it was like I'd come back and I'd say, "Hey, this is what happened." But it wasn't together *with* Him. I realized that one of the ways God has wired me is I go into situations and I think of ways that they could grow, how they could flourish, how they could become better. And when I'm walking with Jesus, I see those situations and I can bring that about with grace and in a way that will just help the situation flourish. But when I start to try and do that on my own, I become critical; I become negative. And I realized over several weeks that I just started seeing all these things could change, but the way I was interacting with people, the way I was interacting with situations was just critical. It was negative. It was not helpful. So I had to gather some of my team and just apologize. *"Hey guys, I've got a really critical spirit. I've just struggled with negativity and comparing and all these*

other pieces, and I was way off." I was trying to do all these things *for* God but not *with* God, and it makes a big difference.

Matthew 28:20, before Jesus left He said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So I wonder what every day would look like if we spent every part of it with Jesus. Think about this just for a second, okay? You wake up tomorrow morning and your first thought as your eyes open up is *I have another day. God, thank you! This is the day that You've made. I'm going to rejoice and be glad in the fact that I get to walk this day with you.* And then as that transitions soon to all the thoughts and things you have to accomplish, the jobs that have to be done, your goals, the things that have to happen at the end of this day, you start becoming overwhelmed. You can remember, *"Whoa, I don't have to be overwhelmed because of the fact that I don't think I can do it," or "I'm not good enough," or "This is too much for me to handle," because God is with me today!* Then as you're getting ready, going about your morning routine, you start thinking about the people that God has placed in your life, and you can realize you can just talk to Jesus about these people, about your concerns, about your hopes and dreams for them, about the way you want them to be able to spend their days with Jesus.

As you continue on, what if you would just think, *"What if I can take one section of my day and just intentionally have some one-on-one time with Jesus?"* I do this with my family. For my son, it translates into what we call "man time". Maybe we're playing a game, or maybe I'm crawling up into his bunk bed at night and he's telling me what happened at school. And I'm listening and I'm talking. Or maybe with my daughter as we have "Daddy-Liddy" time, I'm having a tea party or we're sitting on the couch and she's coloring, and she just wants me to be there and listen and talk. Or maybe with my new daughter, as I'm changing her diaper (I don't know; that's what I got right now), but this one-on-one time where I intentionally say, "Jesus, this is going to be uninterrupted time with You where I can listen as I read Your word, and I can talk to You as I pray."

I know young moms are in here, and my wife had to remind me, "Josh, do you realize that everywhere I go, I'm not alone?" And I'm like, "Yep, because Jesus is right there with you." She's like, "No, I have a 2-foot person with me everywhere I go. Everywhere I go I've got little kids. I can't get away. The only way I can get away from these kids is if I go in the bathroom and lock the door. It's my only time alone!" I said, "That's fine. That'll be your time with Jesus." (laughter) So the kids come home and they try and get in the bathroom, and they're like, "Where's Mom?" "She's having time with Jesus. Leave her alone. Let's not interrupt her!"

In fact, in the Hebrew days, many of the Jews had prayers they would say all throughout the day. One of these prayers is pretty significant. It's called Asher Yatzar. It's actually a prayer they would pray after the bathroom every time. What? Yeah, a little weird, a little strange. "Blessed are you, O God, King of the Universe, who formed man with wisdom and created with him many openings." And they would go on to pray and thank God for these openings—which seems strange, but you know if these openings don't work, you start praying real quick. But what if everything throughout the day was an opportunity to say thank you to God, to be present with God, realizing that everything in this world is not to be disconnected from Him but to be together with Him?

So as I eat, I'm intentional now about what I'm putting into my body. And as I thank God for this food, I'm not doing it out of ritual or because I have to or because that's the tradition that I follow. But I'm doing it as though I'm sitting down with the one that's prepared this food for me at their table, and it comes from gratitude for provision. As I go to school and work, it's not just about getting things done or the work that has to be done or my homework. It's about joining God,

joining Jesus in what He's doing in that situation because of our relationships with the people that are there. And so I can start to look for opportunities to join Jesus in other people's stories. Or as I go to school or work, there comes an opportunity to join Jesus in allowing the way that He has wired me to flourish, to bring about flourishing in those places.

What if I step into situations that are a little bit more challenging for me? I can do it because Jesus is there. I realize that one of the most-often prayers as I start to get into this rhythm of going throughout my day with Jesus is, "God, I need You." I'll be going into a meeting with someone, or I'll be stepping into a situation, and beforehand I'm thinking, "God, I need You." I realize that I want Him to be there because He already is, but I want to be *with* Him there.

Then I realize that the second most-often prayer as I start thinking about it, that I utter throughout the day is, "Thank you," because after I come out of a situation or a meeting, I realize that God is present and He's there with me.

Then as I lay my head down in my bed at night and I'm talking with Jesus about what has happened that day, I can realize that I don't have to worry. I can just give it to Him. Instead of worrying, I can start to thank Him for all the things that He's allowed me to join Him with throughout the day.

If you spend an ordinary day with Jesus, how would your life be different? If you could spend one day with Jesus—let me tell you this—you can spend your whole life with Jesus—one day at a time!

We know that we're walking with Jesus when what we read in the Bible is what others see in our lives. And Joseph, he's the kind of guy that was walking with Jesus every day. You say, "That's cheating; he kind of adopted Jesus into his family. Jesus was there." Yeah, I know that. But Joseph walked with God before this. It tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. But also it goes on to say in verse 24 **...and Joseph awoke from his sleep and did** (action, follow-through), **he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him**. Joseph was the kind of guy that would follow Jesus. He wasn't bewildered; he wasn't clueless.

I'm going to read a little excerpt. This is called "My Fiancée is Having Someone Else's Baby". It's by Greg Asimakoupoulos, and it will help us to understand maybe a little bit more of Joseph in the situation he was in and the reality of choices that he had to make:

> *Only a few weeks ago everything seemed perfect. I just graduated from school with honors. My girlfriend and I got engaged the same day my father made me a full partner in his construction business. I was so excited and definitely in love. Life seemed complete. Even my faith was at an all-time high. And now I feel as though my life is ending. What seemed like the ideal dream has become an unending nightmare. It all started when my fiancée met me after work on one Friday. She looked as though something was bothering her, but I couldn't get her to talk about it. My imagination was running wild. Didn't she love me anymore? Did she want to call off the wedding? Did she have cancer? Was she dying? Had her father abused her? Finally, she whispered the words that I hadn't dared to think: "I'm pregnant." Then she burst into tears.*
>
> *I was stunned. You? Pregnant? But we haven't even…" A wave of nausea hit me as I realized the horrible truth. Because it wasn't me, it had to be someone else. "Who is he?" I forced myself to ask. She looked down. "You wouldn't understand. I just want you to know that I love you. I still want to be your wife." "If you loved me, you wouldn't be in*

the condition you're in," I snapped. But I knew I still loved her with all my heart. That's why it hurt so much.

I was too shocked to say anything the rest of the evening. Although I've never been very emotional, I cried myself to sleep that night. I woke up the next morning, angry, full of questions. How could she do this to me? Hadn't we promised to save ourselves for each other? Didn't she believe in the standard that God had set up for relationships? Was she thumbing her nose at our faith?

"I've made arrangements to leave town for a while," she said a couple of days later as we were closing up the shop. "I think it's best for me and you and for our families. I'll be staying at my cousin's place upstate." I must have been frowning because she added, "Don't worry, my love, I'll be in good hands." She handed me a piece of paper with a phone number where I could reach her. Then she turned and left.

What should I do now? I loved her so much despite my anger. Yet my trust in her had been destroyed. Still, the thought of walking away from the girl of my dreams left me more confused. The shame and embarrassment of being pregnant and unmarried in our small town would be unbearable for her. She would be the target of endless harassment. On the other hand, if I stood by her and pretended that this child is mine, it would destroy my reputation, which was something I didn't think I could risk losing to cover her selfish mistake.

My gut feeling was to break off the engagement and try to forget what happened, but I cared too much for her to make an ugly scene. Maybe I could tell our friends that we called off the wedding and that it was my idea to break up and that she had to get out of town to escape the pain of the decision. I wanted to do what's right. Should I stay with her regardless of what others might think? Or should I quickly break off the engagement and just go on with my life?

Joseph's decision wasn't easy. God never said that life with Him would be easy. But what He did say is that He would never leave us, that He would always be with us. Joseph, walking in step with God (verse 24), said:

> **…and he took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.** (Vs. 24-25)

I wonder what this means for you. I don't know where you're sitting. I don't know what's happening in your life. I don't know if maybe this Christmas could be the change for your life forever because this could be the time where you realize that you are apart from God; you're separated because of your sin, and that today could be the day that you receive this gift of salvation by faith in the Savior that is Jesus Christ. Maybe for you this is a reminder, starting today or starting tomorrow my life will look different because I'm going to spend every part of it with Jesus. Just think of what would be different to begin to spend every part of it with Him. Think of all the things that would change. Think of all the hope that He brings. Think of all the hope that you could join Him to bring to others.

For years the world has waited, and now He's here. Immanuel—Jesus—God with us!

God, thank You that this isn't just a myth or a story. God, thank You that this is truth, that this is You searching for us, relentlessly pursuing us—unending love and grace, forgiveness for us. God, thank You that this time of year we have the opportunity to be reminded and remember the incredible gift You gave us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. God, I don't want to squander my days. I don't want to live my days apart from You. I don't want, at the end of my day or week or month, or even life, to think, "Man, I just missed doing it with You. Because of that, I missed out on so much of what life truly is." God, my prayer for myself and my prayer for all of us is as You're with us that, God, we would invite You into every part of our life and every part of our day. God, you are a good God. We love You. We thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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