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“God with Us”
Text: Isaiah 7:10-17; Matthew 1:18-25; Romans 1:1-7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

God with us. That’s how it was meant to be. How God created things. For Him to be with His children. That’s what He expected as He walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). But something had gone horribly wrong. His children no longer wanted Him there with them. They hid from Him. They were scared of Him. They had ruined everything. They had sinned. And so God with us . . . that was no longer good news.

Except it still was. They just didn’t know it. Adam and Eve didn’t know, couldn’t yet comprehend, how great God’s love for them was. There were consequences for their sin, yes. Things would be difficult now, yes. There would be strife in their marriage, strife in their family, strife between them and God - yes, yes, and yes. But God was not leaving, or giving up on us. God with us was still good news. For when He found them, He made them a promise - of a Saviour.

There were times, though, when it didn’t seem like it - that God was still with us. All those years Abraham was waiting for a son. All those years Israel had to live in Egypt, many of them as slaves. When David had to flee for his life when his king and then his son wanted to kill him. When foreign nations and their armies came in and conquered Israel in battle. When they were hauled off as prisoners of war. Was God still with them? It sure didn’t seem like it.

But He was. Abraham receives his promised son. Israel is preserved and then rescued from Egypt. David is protected. God’s people are disciplined, but never forsaken. God is hidden, maybe. But God is with them.

You know what that’s like. The wondering, the doubting, the guilt, the fear, the but-its-taking-so-long . . . the maybe God’s not with me anymore . . . Maybe I’ve done too much, gone too far, left Him for my sin too much, used up my chances . . . But as God is in the past, He is with you and for you. It is satan who wants you to think God is not with
you or for you; that you’re too far gone, that you’re too sinful. But Christmas is the story, the message, the proof, that what satan wants you to believe is just wishful thinking on his part. For at Christmas we hear again that God is not far away, but near. That He, in fact, joins Himself to your very flesh and blood. And that He does so exactly because you’re too far gone, too sinful - so He come to do something about that. To go to the cross for that. So God is with us, as the angel told Joseph, to save you from your sins.

And so a virgin conceives. Joseph, her betrothed, wants to divorce her; has actually resolved to do so. The decision has been made. It is just the carrying out that needs to be done. A matter of time. A matter of just days or perhaps hours. Maybe tomorrow. And maybe Mary herself is wondering: Where is God when you need Him . . . ? But He is there. Of course He is there. He is inside her. But also watching over her.

So an angel comes to Joseph that very night. And explains to him God with us. This conception is from the Holy Spirit. And the child is God with us. So you shall call his name Jesus for He is the promised Saviour. You see, Joseph, you are not being asked to bear your wife’s sin; she, rather, is carrying the one who will bear your sin! Who is now here to save you and all the world. The fulfillment of the promises made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and through the prophets. He is here, Joseph! In Mary. And you will care for Him who cares for you.

A reasonable man might have just chalked up such a dream to too much drink or hot food the night before - gave me some messed up dreams! But a man of the Word, who knows God’s Word and promises, who knows that what God says, God does, believes. He takes his wife. And though Matthew doesn’t say so, I think he does so filled with joy! I don’t know if we give Joseph enough credit. Mary gets most of the press. But if he believed, which he did, how could he not but be filled with joy? True, this wasn’t going to be easy, but God is with us. With him, Joseph. Here, in Mary. And soon, lying in a manger.

So Joseph is a good teacher for us, as a man of the Word. To be people of the Word. People who know the Word, believe the Word, rely on the Word, and rejoice in the Word. And not just the Word written and preached, but as we remember especially this Christmas season now almost upon us, the Word made flesh. Which is also what the written and preached Word is all about. This birth at the center of time and history. This birth that changed everything. Not just for Mary and Joseph, but for the world. This birth the proof not only that God is with us, but that He will never divorce us. If He were going to, He would have! Instead, He became one flesh with us. He takes our body and blood. This child conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, and named Jesus by His legal-but-not-biological-father Joseph, is God and man in one flesh. United. Forever.

United to you, that you be united to Him. For so the Word of God teaches us. For so has God promised us. That Jesus is here for you. That you are loved by God and called to be saints. And so, as Paul told the Romans, there is grace and peace for you. In Jesus. In
His Word. His Word that forgave your sins and made you His child in Holy Baptism. Where by water and His Word you were born in Him, born again, born from above. And so God with you.

God with you when everything is going well.
God with you when everything is going not so well.
God with you in joy.
God with you in sadness.
God with you at the beginning of life.
God with you at the end of life.
God with you when you’re strong.
God with you when you’re weak.
God with you when you’re confused.
God with you when you think you know.
God with you when He seems close.
God with you when He seems a million miles away.
God with you when you have much.
God with you when you have little.
God with you in danger.
God with you in ease.
God with you in times of blessing.
God with you in times of adversity.

God with us. There may not be a better phrase that sums up Christmas than that. Take away the gifts, the family, the joy, the lights, the carols, the trees, the cards, and you still have God with us. Not to scold us but to save us. Not to teach us about life but to give us life. Not to demand from us but to give to us. To give Himself to us.

That meant something for Mary. She was now going to be a mother. That meant something for Joseph. His life was forever changed, with a wife and son to now care for. And it means something for you, too. For your life.

You see, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from BC to AD, there was continuity, but also a great change. From before the angels came to Mary and Joseph to after, there was continuity, but also a great change. From Jesus crucified to Jesus resurrected, there was continuity, but also a great change. So too from your old to new, from not baptized to baptized child of God, there is continuity, but also a great change. Your life is the same, yet different. You are still a child of man, but now also a child of God. God with you. And that means something. Your life is now changed.

So the same old sins? Not who you are. God is with you. The same old fears? Not who you are. God is with you. The same old loves? Not who you are. God is with you. The same old story of your life? Not who you are. God is with you. You’re the same, but
different. God is with you.

So now maybe you don’t fit in with the world and its thinking. Maybe your life isn’t easy or convenient. Maybe that’s a good thing. So how is it - God with you? How is He working in you? How is He using you? How is He changing you? How is He blessing others through you? How is He loving the old out of your life, so that you be who you now are? New. God with you.

I’m sure, as you look at your life, there’s plenty of room for repentance, and plenty of need for forgiveness. I’m sure, too, that there’s plenty of room for praise. As I’m sure there has been and continues to be a lot of grace and peace, too. For that’s how it is with God with you. That’s how it is as you come to the altar - there is repentance, there is forgiveness, there is gift, there is grace and peace, and there is praise. For God is with you here. God is for you here. The Body and Blood of God placed into you, fed to you. How could you not be changed?

And so how it was meant to be, God has made it again. God is with us. In Adam there was a great change. In Jesus, an even greater one. And what was lost has been restored, and more. More than you could ever imagine.

This Christmas, think about that. God with us. God with you. God one of us, now and forever. Things the same, yet forever different. The same you yet different you. You baptized into Jesus. Jesus fed into you. God is man, man to deliver (LSB #360 v. 2). Or an the angels said to the shepherds (and as we will hear on Tuesday night): Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

Good news and great joy indeed! Promise fulfilled. God with us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.