

“Jesus, God With Us”

Giv 2020

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This Christmas season is not what any of us envisioned this time last year.

In a year where every day feels the same and it feels impossible to keep track of time, that we remind ourselves that 2,000 years ago, Jesus - the God of the Universe - was born. And because of His presence made known among us, there is so much reason to hope no matter what kind of year you’ve had.

"This year is not what anyone expected, for sure. I've been thinking about it and that's an aspect of the Christmas story that I connect with now more than ever. In a small way, I can somewhat relate to some of the unexpected aspects of Jesus' birth.

And for the next few weeks during this Advent season, we want to press in on this hope that God gives and see what He’s calling us to do. Advent is Latin for the word “arrival” when we anticipate and welcome the birth of Jesus 2,000 years by setting aside four weeks in the church calendar to set our hearts on this good news.

Now a disclaimer: The goal for Advent isn't to tell you something new. Advent isn't necessarily about learning new things or fresh perspectives on the life and teachings of Jesus. Advent is about remembering. Advent is about coming back in our minds and hearts to the truest true thing about the world - that God came to the world to save it.

Today I want to start in a passage that you'll probably think has absolutely nothing to do with Christmas, but by the end of this, I think you’re going to see that it does.

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Alright real quick, this is the prophet Isaiah around 700BC in one of Israel’s most tumultuous times,
- Worship of idols was rampant amongst God's people.
- On top of that, the Assyrian empire is knocking on their door ready to come in and conquer them. and he has this vision that He is in the presence of God, inside the temple, the Holy of Holies. One thing to notice is the reaction of the angels, they can't even stand to look at God or even walk the ground He’s on. It’s just all too much for even angels to be around.

Isaiah 6:4

Then the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Can you imagine that? The presence of God being so overwhelming and powerful that an earthquake begins to happen and white-hot smoke begins to billow out from every corner of the room. It's like a scene from a natural disaster movie.

"So what do you think Isaiah's reaction to this earthquake, white-hot smoke billowing vision of God? You think he grabbed a guitar and said 'God let me sing you a worship song real quick'? Think he was like "Oh cool. Immanuel. God is with me! Merry Christmas." Not quite. Check out v.5:

Isaiah 6:5

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

In other words, "I am undone. This is it for me. I can't see God's presence in all its fullness and glory and live to talk about it because I am a sinner."

To give you an illustration, imagine you go into work and you're slacking off not really doing anything, maybe you've spent all day watching YouTube videos and at the end of the day, your boss calls you into his office. He asks, "What did you work on today?" And you give him some vague dishonest answer. And he replies, "Well, I know that's not true, because I've walked by your office and I know you've been watching YouTube videos all day." I imagine you would feel a twist in your stomach, and your mind would race into panic mode because you've been caught, you're exposed, you're embarrassed and ashamed being in the presence of your boss with all of it laid out like that. Now imagine this turned up by a thousand. This is what Isaiah is experiencing at this moment.

So what does this vision that's near 3,000 years old have to do with us here, now? You see, what's happening is Isaiah is having a moment where he is clearly aware of how flawed he is and how amazing and powerful God is. He sees in an instant how he has failed to love, honor, serve God as he should. And he begins to just come apart at the seams. All of his sin and all of his shortcomings are exposed.

This is what happens to us when we experience a godly conviction of sin. When we understand that our sin and our brokenness are seen and laid bare before a holy, righteous all-powerful God. When we see God correctly, the sin in us is exposed and we can be left feeling embarrassed, ashamed, guilty, and fearful.

I don't know if you will connect with this at all, but in these last 8-9 months in the midst of this pandemic, I've experienced more times than I can count just how much I fall short and all the sin that's been exposed in me. And how I wish I was handling this covid season better than I am.

But it is really hard to care about work or faith when time just feels abstract and one day feels just like the other. And I can work but I don't really see any effect because I don't get to see people nearly as much. And listen, I love my kids and we've set some sweet rhythms in place since the pandemic to spend time together, but man, parenting has crushed me over and over again during this season and there have been days where I feel so overwhelmed with my kids that I've cried exhausted tears.

Now I don't know what sin has been exposed in your heart during this pandemic but for you maybe it's **apathy**. Like, you know what you should be doing - spending time with Jesus, confessing sin to God and others, fighting to stay in community with your LifeGroup - but you just don't want to. Because life is hard enough as it is and you'd rather check out.

For some of us, apathy has taken the shape of all sorts of coping mechanisms - maybe that's food or alcohol or drugs - after a long hard day you find yourself needing something to take the edge off and it's become a habit and you find yourself needing more and more to feel comfortable and numb yourself to reality. Or maybe it's Netflix because it's way easier to feel productive by saying you blitzed through a show than to spend time with you Jesus and community. Whatever you're running to, this pandemic is exposing in us our sin and how we're struggling in our mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Or maybe you're a **parent** and these last 8-9 months have been some of the hardest times you've had with your kids because schools and parks and libraries have for the most part been closed and you just can't escape them. And you've seen just how impatient and annoyed and angry you get or you've just given in to them and let them run the show in your house because it's easier.

Whatever the sin issue that this pandemic has exposed in your heart - the question we're left with is this: how on Earth can a holy, perfect God live alongside broken, sinful people like us?

Well, in the very next chapter of Isaiah he's going to give us a prophecy that completely flips the script:

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The Spirit speaking through Isaiah says that the only way for God and people to coexist is through a virgin giving birth to a son. And this son's name will be Immanuel. That's Hebrew for "God with us". So somehow, this virgin conceived son is going to make a way for God to be with us. That's the prophecy, 700 years before the birth of Jesus. That's a fairly low-odds prediction, and yet, that's exactly what happened.

Let's fast forward and see how Matthew picks up this prophecy from Isaiah 7 and connects it to the birth of Jesus. (I told you Isaiah was really about Christmas!)

Matthew 1:21-23

"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

Through the birth of Jesus, God in all of His fullness and power and glory will take on our humanity. And he's not going to wipe you out, he's going to step into your mess. He's going to take on your sin on the Cross. Jesus will face the terrifying earthquake of God's wrathful presence for our sin so we can receive God's presence as a gracious, loving Father. Through His birth and His blood, He will take us sinner and

call us saints. When we were enemies and He will call us friends, members of the family of God. We were condemned to death, but Jesus comes to give us life. He saves us from our sin and shows us a better way to live. A life of freedom, of hope, of love, of joy, that no sin or pandemic can take away from you.

I want us to hear that because Jesus has come, because Jesus is God with Us, is not like God is like that boss who's caught you, but that He has made a way to be with you by rescuing you from your sin and brokenness. He has unlocked for you his presence and love even in the worst of circumstances. No matter how apathetic you may have been this year or how much you think you've blown it as a parent, no matter your sin that's been exposed this year.

Know that through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, God made a way for us to be in His presence. That is good news family.

- For those who trust in Jesus, rather than having shame or embarrassment we now have hope, and peace and love and joy that comes from renewing our hope over and over again in God's presence and love for you. Rather than God's presence being terrifying and exposing and unsettling... it's the most comforting gift in the world.

What a beautiful thing to consider and celebrate as we step into the Advent season.

- God sees you. and in Christ, he accepts you.
- God knows you. and in Christ he loves you.
- God sees and he knows you, and in Christ, he is not disappointed in you.

Because Jesus has come to save us from our sins, God likes you. Wherever you're at. If you're nailing this pandemic. Like, if you are currently your best self, and you're just killing it out there. Or if you are an absolute mess and feel like you are falling apart. In Christ, God loves you. He sees you. Knows you. Likes you. And is WITH. US.

So our call every year during Advent is to remember. To hope in Jesus. He arrived 2,000 years ago to rescue us from sin and for those that follow Him, one day He is coming back to free us from all of sin's havoc and decay. And so our hope is that you would fix your eyes on His love for you more than you would fix your eyes on the sin in and around you. No matter what you've done this past year, no matter what kind of year it's been for you.

So to make this really practical for us, we actually wrote a brand-new month-long devotional book for you, filled each day with scripture and questions and truths from God's Word for you to meditate on to help you more fix your eyes on Jesus during this season.

Your LifeGroup leaders, if they haven't already, will be giving these out to you - but it's our aim that this is something we're all doing together. That we would all fix our eyes on the same beautiful truths that Jesus offers us. And if you already have a daily routine or devotional to spend time with Jesus, that's beautiful and I would encourage you to add this small piece to your existing habits so you can participate in something we're doing all across our city as a Family of Churches. If you have those in LifeGroup who are struggling with spending consistent time with Jesus, this will be a really easy and encouraging way for you to help one another follow Jesus together.

I'd encourage you to check out the Midweek podcast this week with all the goodies we have in there for you, but our heart behind this is so you can deepen your love for Jesus even more during this season. For you to more fully see and appreciate that God is with us. Because if you ever want to be a person of hope, and love, and peace, and joy - to be a person who looks more and more like Jesus each day, to know down in your bones that God is with you - it starts with daily spending time with Him.

Because family, that's what we need right now. With the year that we've had, let's not waste this Advent season. Let's let the truth of Advent sink into our hearts so that we might end this year more in tune with the love of Jesus than ever before, knowing that He is God with Us.