

# God with Us

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so in the reading we had earlier that Neil read for us from Matthew's Gospel, Matthew picks up on this verse from the prophet Isaiah. So I'm going to read it again, Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel. Okay, I'd just like to think for a few moments now on that verse and on why the coming of Jesus at Christmas time is so significant for our world.

And really to follow on a bit from what we were saying with the children about how the Bible has lots of promises about Jesus that are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus on that very first Christmas.

Now there are lots of signs in society as we get ready for the approach of Christmas and Christmas Day on the 25th of December. And so Christmas music in the shops in say September means that Christmas is coming.

Talking about where you're spending Christmas Day in October means that Christmas is coming. In November shopping for Christmas presents means that Christmas is on its way, it's coming.

[ 1 : 22 ] In December going to the shops, buying food, preparing food and so on means that Christmas is coming. Now Christmas has arrived, we're here, Christmas Day 25th of December 2024, Christmas has come, it's arrived.

Now all of these signs point to the fact that Christmas is coming and now Christmas is here. And in the same way God was preparing the world for the coming of Jesus on that very first Christmas. And just like we see signs leading up to Christmas today, so God was giving signs all the way through the Old Testament part of the Bible to get people ready for the coming of Jesus, to prepare the world for Jesus to enter into it.

Okay, so just like we make plans for Christmas, arranging travel perhaps, or buying presents, or sending cards, or cooking food.

So we make plans, but God also had a plan for that very first Christmas. A plan for how his son, Jesus, would come into this world.

[ 2 : 35 ] He wanted the world to be ready. He wanted the world to know about his plan. In fact, from the very beginning, God had said that Jesus would be coming.

He promised to send him. So way back at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 3, after the creation, there was then the fall of humanity, and the world was ruined.

But in what God said at that time, he was saying that somebody would come, and he would come as the seed of a woman, Eve, the first woman in the world, that he would send his Savior, his Messiah, his King, from the seed of this woman.

So God was saying that Jesus would be coming since the very, very beginning. So the fact that he would come from a woman means that Jesus would be a human being.

But also, in that promise God gave in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, he said that the seed of this woman would be a serpent crusher. In other words, he would defeat and destroy the works of the devil.

[ 3 : 46 ] And so he wouldn't just be a human, he would also be God, fully human and fully God coming into this world. And then God revealed more and more and more about who Jesus would be and what Jesus would do.

And it comes through all of these different prophecies in the Old Testament part of the Bible. And we're thinking this morning, just for a few moments, on one of those prophecies about Jesus, the one from Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14.

Let me read it again. The prophet Isaiah said, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel.

Now here's a question for the boys and girls. Okay, are you listening? Here's a question. What does Emmanuel mean? What does Emmanuel mean? God with us, God with us, God with us. Well done. Great, you know what Emmanuel means. It means God with us. Emmanuel is Jesus, because Jesus is God with us. Now, this promise that God was going to send a baby came about 700 years before Jesus ended up in this world.

[ 5 : 04 ] Before he showed up, God was promising that he was coming. God was saying that he would come because God's people were in need.

They were in danger, they needed help. They needed a savior. They needed a rescuer. And he was coming. Now, this prophecy that came to a man called Ahaz in the book of Isaiah came to him. He was a king, the king of Israel. And God told Ahaz, this king, through Isaiah to ask for a sign. To ask for a sign about how God would help his people.

Now, Ahaz thought he didn't need to ask for a sign. And in fact, he said earlier on in Isaiah chapter 7, And Ahaz might have sounded religious, saying he didn't want a sign, but actually he was being rebellious.

And so Isaiah the prophet said, Well, God is going to give you a sign anyway. You will get a sign. And the sign would be, The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

[ 6 : 17 ] Now, Isaiah, because this was 700 years before Jesus came, probably had no idea just how this promise would be fulfilled.

No clue. How a child called Emmanuel would come from the womb of a virgin. Now, whatever this promise meant at the time, Matthew, in his gospel, which we read, Matthew chapter 1, he picks up on this promise from Isaiah to say that the person this promise is speaking about, the child who would come from the virgin, is Jesus.

Matthew's saying this is Jesus who has come, who fulfills this promise in Isaiah. And so the virgin conception and birth of Jesus is saying to Mary and Joseph, but it's also saying to you and me that this child was and is Emmanuel, God with us.

But it's a strange sign, a virgin conception. It's odd. It's weird. It's a startling sign that God's rescuer, God's deliverer for the world, would be not just a tiny baby, but a baby in the womb of a virgin woman.

So it wasn't just a strange sign. It wasn't just a startling sign. It was also a staggering sign that this baby would be human, but also God.

[ 7 : 54 ] So God would stoop so low to become born as a baby in this world. But it's also a spectacular sign because it's saying that God has come to be with us.

Emmanuel, God with us. And that's the sign that God has given to our world. And it's remarkable because God doesn't just give the sign.

What Isaiah is saying is, and what Matthew is saying is, God himself is the sign. The baby Jesus is the sign that we need to pay attention to.

And that is the wonder of Christmas because Jesus' birth was no ordinary birth. Now, scientifically speaking, a virgin conception and birth is impossible.

It doesn't happen. Except with God. Because this, of course, was no ordinary child. And that's why his birth didn't come about in an ordinary, normal way.

[ 9 : 00 ] But God is able to work above and beyond the laws of nature because he created the laws of nature in the first place. He's able to work above and beyond them in order to carry out his plans.

And so it shouldn't be surprising to us that God could cause a virgin to conceive a child. And we're not saying that it's easy to understand how Mary was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. But the fact that she was pregnant and was a virgin is actually entirely consistent with how God works in this world. And it's perfectly logical to expect that the God who created the universe out of nothing is more than able to bring his son into the world in this way through a virgin.

And the virgin birth demonstrates to us how God was fully, sorry, how Jesus was fully man and also fully God. And that's why this is a momentous and marvelous mystery which is at the heart of human history.

The birth of Jesus is a supernatural act of God. But then it wasn't just the birth of Jesus that was supernatural. It was followed up by many more supernatural acts in Jesus' life as he went about healing the sick and controlling the weather and raising the dead.

[ 10 : 30 ] And also as he himself died and then rose victorious from the grave in his resurrection. So the life of Jesus from the very beginning through to the very end is proof of God dwelling on

earth of Emmanuel God with us.

God coming because we're in danger and in need of help. And like the people of Isaiah's day, they could do nothing to help themselves so we can do nothing to help ourselves.

We needed God to send his son into the world for us. And he did in the birth of Jesus. There's nothing that we can do to reach up to God.

But the good news of Christmas is that from outside our world, God has come in and reached out to get us in Jesus being born amongst us.

He came to be with us in order to save us. So Christmas speaks of God condescending down to our level. But more than that, of God humbling himself through his death on a cross.

[11:50] How could God die by taking on human nature, human flesh and blood and becoming a man? but also God because his death only has effect if he is God.

He can only be our savior if he's God. So the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus tell us that God came to be with us.

Not God against us. Some people have the wrong idea of God and think God is just some big cosmic spoil sport or policeman who's always down on us all the time.

No, God is not against us. God is for us in Jesus. And God is not just above us. God is with us in Jesus. And that's why the message of Jesus coming at Christmas is good news for every single one of us in this world.

Because God is saying loudly and clearly to us and the most significant person who has ever lived in the history of our world, God is saying to us that he is with us and he is for us and for our salvation.

[13:07] Now Christmas time is often just about Santa. And I'm sure you knew that Santa is based on a man called Father Christmas.

And I'm sure you knew that Father Christmas is based on a real person called St. Nicholas. We've all heard of St. Nicholas. But what I think that people haven't heard about is that St. Nicholas, who was one of the leaders in the church, St. Nicholas, during one of the church councils in 325, so a long time ago, in 325, in the Council of Nicaea, St. Nicholas punched a heretic in the face.

So that's Santa for you. He punched somebody in the face. And the reason St. Nicholas punched somebody in the face was because they misunderstood who Jesus was.

Because the very Council of Nicaea was all about the identity of Jesus. How he is fully God and fully man at the same time.

His human nature goes alongside his divine nature. He's always God. He was and is always God. That's his nature.

[14:19] But he took on human nature and became man. And it's when we fail to understand that that we can so easily dismiss Jesus as being irrelevant for our lives.

And yet he came to save us because we can't save ourselves. We are in danger and in need of help. And help has arrived in Jesus.

Jesus is the sign that God has given to our world. A sign for us to pay attention to. A sign that promises that we can be forgiven for all the wrong things that we have done.

The punishment we deserve for all of our sins is forgiven by Jesus at the cross. Not only are we forgiven in Jesus but also we inherit the salvation that comes from Jesus.

So we stand to inherit everything that Jesus has won for us. And it's all ours the forgiveness the inheritance when we put our trust in him.

[15:26] And so the question for us to end on on Christmas day is have you put your trust in him? He's God's sign for us. He came to us.

He is God with us. So have you gone to him? Or will you trust him? Jesus is Emmanuel God with us.

And so please remember that today. Have a great time. Enjoy your Christmas dinner. The turkey the trimmings the Brussels sprouts the gravy the Christmas pudding whatever else.

have a great Christmas day. But remember whatever age you are whatever stage in life you're at remember that Jesus has promised never to leave us and to be with us always.

And that's the best gift we could ever ever receive. Let's pray together.