

Merry Christmas, everyone.

²³ “Behold (Look), the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel” , (which means, God with us).

On Christmas morning, we remember, and celebrate the birth of a little baby boy – not just any baby, but God Himself.

In 1995 Joan Osborn released a No.1 hit song, called “one of us”, and in it, she asks the question, “What if God was one of us?” ... Well, that’s a bazaar question. That’s a bit like asking “What if the sun was hot?”; or “What if the water was wet?”; or “What if politicians didn’t always tell the truth?” ...

You see, God **was** one of us. In Jesus Christ, God **did** become Human – He emptied Himself of His glory – He emptied Himself of His immortality, so that He could die on the cross to save us.

And Jesus has completed that part of His mission – He was born; He taught; He suffered; He died; He rose; He ascended to heaven

So, if that’s all been done, “Is God still with us today?”

To know God as “Emmanuel”, does that mean I would’ve had to have lived in 1st century Judea??? Would I’ve had to looked upon a little baby boy in a manger? Would I’ve had to walked the road to Jerusalem, and have gazed up at a cross of wood, blackened by dry blood????

When today, I share with a Christian brother or sister, who are going through the most horrendous of circumstances, if I were to say to them, “God is with you”, is that the truth? Is there any hope – Is there any encouragement – is there any joy in those words at all????

Is God still God Emmanuel, or did God stop being with us when Jesus ascended to heaven????

Where is the hope? Where is the encouragement? Where is the joy, of God with us ... today?

On Sunday just gone, I spoke about preparing for Christmas. And we went forwards, a page or 2 in the Bible, to hear how John the Baptist told us to get prepared for the coming of Christ.... And what we learned, is that Jesus Christ impacts greatly on every single one of us.

John the Baptist said, ^{3:11} “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Let there be no mistake: The Lord Jesus Christ, has a dramatic impact on each and every one of us: Those who reject Christ, will be judged, and condemned to hell – baptised with fire.

But those who receive Christ are impacted in a very different way... John says, He will baptise us with the Holy Spirit – now, what does that mean???

When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, He said to them, “I’m going to leave you shortly, but don’t be too sad about it, because unless I go, I can’t send you my Holy Spirit.” ... And then, at Pentecost, the Christian church was baptised with the Holy Spirit.

And Christians today, are baptised by the Holy Spirit.

What it means, is God makes His home, in the heart of the believer, and they will never be the same again... (old kids song “Joy is the flag flown high”)

God didn’t stop being Emmanuel when Jesus ascended into Heaven – that’s when it became possible for **all** of us to have God with us...

*If Jesus **didn’t** ascend to heaven, and was still walking on the earth today, can you imagine what His Christmas schedule would be like????... How long do you think we’d have to wait, for it to be our turn, for Jesus to turn up in this combined service gathering????*

We’d probably get about a 3 second slot, at 2 minutes to midnight, December 25th, in the year 2147.....

God couldn’t be with us – not with everyone – not if it depended on meeting Jesus in person...

And so God sent His Holy Spirit, to truly be with us in a very real and personal way...

God is with us today, because when you give your heart to Him, He gives His Spirit to you.. He fills His people with His Holy Spirit...

OK, so what does the name “Emmanuel” mean?

That’s right – “God with us”. I want you to understand this – it does **not** mean “Baby with us”. We don’t drive our cars around with a little yellow sticker, saying “Emmanuel on board”.

It is **God** with us.

God was born as a baby, but God ain’t no baby no more....

We all probably know an over-protective mother somewhere... A mother who still wants to keep her 36 year-old son as ‘her little boy’, and if she had her way, he’d still be going to bed with a warm bottle and his little teddy bear at 7 o’clock at night...

And you might laugh, but for many people, they want to keep Jesus as a baby. For them, Emmanuel means, “baby with us” – not “God with us”...

Do you know why Christmas time is loved by everybody, and not just Christians???? It’s because they want to keep God as a baby.

Babies are great. When we had our kids, we thought “Right, they’re just going to fit right into our schedule” – and they did... Babies are great – When they’re little:

- *you can just wrap them up and put them down on the floor anywhere, and they’re still there when you come back...*
- *You’re the one who decides when you feed them.*

- *You're the one who decides then it's time for them to go to bed.*
- *If they start to get a bit annoying, you can just put them to bed a bit earlier – they'll eventually go to sleep.*
- *Babies don't ask you tough questions.*
- *They don't tell you hard truths.*
- *Babies will not judge you, because they actually don't understand what you're doing when they see you doing it*
- *In fact, they won't even remember what they saw you do, when they are old enough to understand...*

Babies are great, but they start to grow up, hey???...

And when Jesus walked the road to the cross, He was no baby. When Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and argued the law with the Pharisees and Sadducees, He was no baby...

And when Jesus returns again, to judge the living and the dead, every eye will see, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess... and He will be no baby....

You hear a lot in literature, movies, greeting cards – all that sort of stuff – about the Christmas spirit... Can anyone define it? Can someone describe it to me????

This isn't a trick question – what does the world understand as “the Christmas Spirit”?

(peace on earth, good will, everyone trying really hard to get on with each other, even if it's just for one day)....

I want to tell you about the real Christmas Spirit. The real Christmas spirit, is Emmanuel – God with us. The real Christmas spirit, is the Holy Spirit, living inside of us....

I've grown tired of Christmas messages telling everyone to try that little bit harder for the day.

I've grown tired of Christmas messages, telling everyone to get on... telling everyone to be generous... telling everyone to have peace... , Because that's not the real Christmas Spirit... - it's only trying to mimic the Christmas Spirit....

Let me explain:

Most people (who have any sort of moral compass), modify their behaviour, depending who's around...

So, in a shearing shed, you hear the words "Ducks on the pond", and everybody stops swearing because they know a woman has entered the shed (at least in the old days that happened).

When you see a police car behind you, you're extra careful not to go over the speed limit.

I know as a minister or a pastor, some people get really embarrassed if they let themselves swear in front of me – "Oh, sorry Father"....

We modify our behaviour, depending on who's around...

But the problem is, even many Christians live as if God is a baby in the corner, paying no attention, not going to do

anything about it... Instead of living as if the one true God, is in their heart.

When you become aware, that God is **really** with you – that He's with you 24-7 – you'll begin to modify your behaviour... But that's only the start.

I'll tell you what the true Spirit of Christmas is – It's when God who is living inside of you, does His work of transformation in you...

The true Spirit of Christmas is not simply trying harder to be a better person – it is putting to death our old self – it is surrendering the pride of self to God, so that the God who transforms lives, changes who we are, and how we behave...

In Galatians Ch5, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit: **love.., joy.., peace.., patience.., kindness.., goodness.., faithfulness.., gentleness.., self-control.....**

He could've been describing what the world looks for in the Christmas Spirit, hey????

And that, is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. If you're lacking this sort of fruit in your life, there's only one cure for it – you've got to get right with God and put off self, and crave for God to change you...

This Christmas, don't be content with pretending to love each other – don't be content with creating an illusion of peace or joy... Don't settle for anything other than the real thing.

Ask the Lord Jesus Christ, to come into your heart. Pray and ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit... Be reconciled to one another... Crucify that fleshly nature you have, that works in opposition to the Spirit... Give up your pride, and submit to the Lord...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

Be to us, Emmanuel – God with us.

Lord, our prayer is, that this Christmas,

we wouldn't only be trying harder,

But that you would work out through us – changing us to be more like you.

Lord, as we submit ourselves to You, fill us with your Holy Spirit.

As we give up our pride;

As we crucify our lusts, our self-righteousness, and the works of our flesh,

Lord, fill all of these areas of our lives, with Your Spirit.

Lord, may the fruit of the Spirit be evidenced in our lives.

Lord, Fill us with love; Fill us with Joy; Fill us with peace;

Fill us with **patience.., kindness.., goodness..,**

faithfulness.., gentleness.., self-control.....

May the Spirit of Christmas, be the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts.

God with us. God in us.

Amen.