**Putting Christmas in Context**
**By Bob Young**

December, the last month of the year.  Thoughts turn to Christmas and the blessing we have received through God's greatest gift.  Thoughts turn to New Year's and the need to improve our lives—resolutions, beginning again.  Have you thought about the larger context?  All of this can become mundane and repetitive without context.

God created man for fellowship with him. The relationship was broken by the entry of sin into the world.  The story of the Bible is the story of God at work to reestablish the broken relationship with his human creation. It is the story of Abraham and his descendants and a covenant promise that pointed to God's future blessings.  It is a story that moves from the patriarchs to the nation of Israel.  Israel received a law designed to help them live in holiness and a tabernacle was erected in the center of the camp so that God could dwell among them. Later Solomon built a temple to house God's presence among his people. Even before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, in the first stages of the Exile Ezekiel saw God's glory leave the temple.

But God had not given up on the idea of dwelling among his people. The Word became a man and dwelt among us.  In Jesus' coming, God is present in human form, divinity united with humanity, God united with us.  Jesus Emmanuel comes as the saving presence of God among men.  The narrow context of Christmas is the story of a baby in a manger.  The greater context of Christmas is that God has now come among us to be present, that divinity dwells among us and in us.  We are the dwelling of God; Christ dwells in our hearts; we are the temple of God's Spirit.  God's Emmanuel presence is for us assurance, knowledge, power, comfort, guidance, confidence, joy, and peace!  Let us not become so focused on the temporal story that we miss the eternal story that gives us hope that our lives can be changed.