

Immanuel: God with us

By Bob Young

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Although the Bible never says exactly what time of the year Jesus was born, the time of year is near when the majority of the Christian world remembers and celebrates the birth of Jesus. Matthew's nativity narrative mentions Immanuel, declaring that in Jesus' coming, "God is with us." Have we understood? Have we explored this idea? What does this declaration mean for you and for me? How and why does this truth change our lives?

Regardless of exact timing, let us not miss the importance of the initial chapters of Matthew. The "God with us" event means that God himself has penetrated the human experience. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit have taken up permanent residence in our cities and towns, in our homes, in our lives. As we contemplate the reality of such an incredible truth, how shall we then live? What shall we do with this unexpected bonus, this time and this life that is marked by God's certain presence, Christ inhabiting hearts, the Holy Spirit living within?

The "God with us" event means that God understands the human dilemma totally. He became human and lived among us. He knows our situation from firsthand experience.

The "God with us" event made possible our salvation through Jesus' perfect and faithful sacrifice.

With the arrival of the Kingdom, God's new spiritual family, there is no place for measuring success or failure. Christianity declares that he is with us. The truth for you and for me today is that he is already here. These words from Mark Bergin may help us understand: "And so we open the Scriptures and say our prayers, not in an effort to be with him, but because he is already with us."

What a wonderful truth, shining light clearly on a common misunderstanding of the Christian life. Bible reading and prayer is not a part of a daily checklist to be pleasing to God. For the Christian, communication with God is not courtship and seeking relationship. It is the faithful action of the bride of the Lamb seeking ever-deepening relationship and understanding, ever growing love.