

“God With Us” // Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7 // *God With Us 4* Christmas at DPAC 2013

Icebreaker:

- How many excited about Christmas?
- How many of you are done with your Christmas shopping?
- Anyone still have gifts left to buy? May the joy of going to the mall tonight be your blessing...
- How many are re-gifting a gift this year? (Maybe they are beside you)?
 - From this Christmas?
- How many of you bought a gift for yourself this year while you were shopping away for others? Don't worry; nothing to be ashamed of... if you bought one, or two, or seven gifts for yourself...
- How many are nervous about seeing family during the holidays?
- How many are going to meet future in-laws?
- How many have a gift they're excited to give?

Intro:

One of the phrases you've heard over and over today is “God with us.”

That statement comes from a prophecy Isaiah made more than 800 years before Jesus was born. He said: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall him ‘Immanuel’” (Isaiah 7:14) (which, in Hebrew, means “God with us.”¹)

I want **everyone to leave today knowing** that *God is with you*.

- When you **believe and know that God** is with you, it will change everything in your life.
- Think about it: **what if you knew today**—you could leave here today, knowing—that God was with you—for you—on your side; your help; your advocate; working in your life; working in your family?
- Can you know that? Is that arrogant—or a deluded hope?

Here's what Isaiah promised would happen when that child was born: “The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)²

So let's ask: **What kind of darkness were they in?** Israel, as a nation, was **under siege**; **ECONOMICALLY** things weren't good; their very **existence as a nation** was threatened. They felt like they were “dwelling in the **region and shadow of death**.”

So it was:

- ...the **darkness of uncertainty** about the future
- ...the darkness of **fear about their safety** and the safety of their loved ones
- ...the fear of **being abandoned, all alone**
- ...the fear of being **abandoned by God** because of their sin. Had they angered God and disqualified themselves from his love?

Maybe you feel like you are in the same kind of darkness:

- Uncertainty about your future.
- Fear of being alone. The feeling that you are abandoned.
- Fear of death: your death, or the death of a loved one.
 - Freud famously pointed out that the fear of death dominates us more than we realize, at whatever age we are.
 - Dying; being forgotten
 - Or just not knowing what happens when you die

¹ Quoted Matthew 1:23

² Quoted Matthew 4:16

So, what did God do?

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall him ‘Immanuel’” (Isaiah 7:14)

A **virgin**, we know her name now as “Mary,” would conceive a son.

- He would not be a normal son; he **wouldn’t just be** an enlightened man or a super hero or a political savior, he would be God with us.
- He **would live the most unusual life.**
 - He **wouldn’t be born into power** and privilege, to rule the world from a throne, as you would expect;
 - he would be **born in poverty**, identify with the **guilty and the oppressed**,
 - and grow up to **die, unjustly, a criminal’s death**—even though there was nothing “wrong” anyone could say he had done.
- He was **born that way because** he was identifying with us; uniting himself to us.
 - He was **born in poverty** because, in reality, that’s what all of us are before God;
 - he **died a criminal’s death** because he was bearing our sin. He wasn’t dying for his sin, Isaiah said, but ours: **“Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows... he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, so that by his stripes we could be healed.”** (Isaiah 53:4–5)

BOOK ILLUS. He removed the guilt that separated us from God.

How did that bring darkness to light? What if I told you that all of our other fears went back to a disconnect we feel from God?

- Some of the most insightful writers of our time have pointed out that a lot of our drive in life goes back to a fear we have that we are not accepted, not approved, and under judgment...

- **Arthur Miller** (wrote *Death of a Salesman*) was once explaining in an interview the themes behind a lot of his plays in an interview and he said that after he stopped believing in God he still carried around this sense of judgment. And he still felt like he needed to prove himself to others.³ He said in later life that he realized he had simply replaced the need to be approved by God with the need to be approved by people.
- **Madonna (whom I typically don’t quote in sermons)** said this in *Vogue Magazine*: *“My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will.”*⁴
- **The Bible explains this in Genesis 2:** stripped of the love and acceptance of God.

What if the problem behind all other problems in your life was being separated from God?

- **What if what made you feel darkness** had nothing to do with being physically alone at Christmas, or worried about the future; or economic hardship—but had to do with a sense that you were separated from God?

Look at how Isaiah went on to describe the birth of this strange child:

“...for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall sit upon his shoulder, and he shall be called Wonderful Counselor... (Isaiah 9:6)

³ From Tim Keller sermon on Hebrews 7:18–27 at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005.

⁴ Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, 22.

“...Wonderful Counselor”

- Counselor means helper. Someone who walks with you through life, shoulders the heavy load, and promises to turn all the bad things in your life for good.

“...Mighty God, Everlasting Father”

- I would suggest to you that if there was ever anything that we needed in a Savior, it was a perfect and everlasting Father.
- For some of you, your **sweetest childhood memories** go back to the love of your dad.
- For others, some of the greatest pain in your life goes back to a messed up relationship to your father.
 - Maybe he was **abusive**;
 - maybe he was **never there**—divorce took him away,
 - or just **too busy**. **40% of** children in our society grow up in homes with no dad present at all.
 - Or maybe your primary memory is how **disappointed** he always seemed to be with you.
 - Maybe he was just **never emotionally connected** to you; you never heard him say, “I love you,” or “I’m proud of you.”
 - **Bo Jackson**, who some argue was the greatest athlete to ever live—said this in an interview in *Sports Illustrated*: “My father has never seen me play a football or baseball game. Can you imagine? Here I am, Bo Jackson, one of the so-called premier athletes in the country, and I’m sitting in the locker room and envying every one of my teammates whose dad would come in and talk, have a beer with them after the game. I never experienced that.”⁵
- Jesus was the “*everlasting father*.” The real father of which all other fathers were supposed to represent to us.
 - **I tell my kids all the time**. “I’m your dad, but I’m just a stand in for your eternal dad. His love is even greater for you than mine!”

- **Isaiah explained** that God’s thoughts toward us are like a father looking at their newborn child... **Zephaniah: rejoices over us with singing**.
- But **even greater**: A God who cared enough about our salvation that even after we had rejected him and done him wrong came to earth in pursuit of us, willing to suffer himself for our sin to bring us back to him.
- **One of our pastors, Ryan**... In the Congo, fighting for his son. Paid money, hit a snag. Not sure if he can get him. ***This is my Dad, fighting for me***. But he came a lot farther, paid a lot more.

“...the Prince of Peace”

- He would bring us peace by restoring us to peace with God.
 - Secret: Horizontal brokenness goes back to a vertical disconnect.
 - **Pascal: God-shaped hole**.
- **Peace with God** (vertical) leads to the **peace of God** (horizontal).
 - **Just look at what happens to people when they really find God**: better husbands; more content as wives; better fathers; more forgiving.

~~...of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David to establish it and uphold it forevermore.” (Isaiah 9:6–7)~~

- ~~The “**throne of David**” is the Jewish hope for peace on earth; where the creation flourishes; mankind lives in harmony with each other and in fellowship with God.~~
- ~~**One day this child** born from a virgin, Isaiah says, will restore this kind of peace on earth. He will **right all wrongs**, establish justice, and restore the earth as it was meant to be. He will, in the words of **JRR Tolkien**, make “every sad thing come untrue.”~~
- ~~But **first, he had to be born as a substitute** for our sin to reconcile us to God.~~

This was the light God sent into our darkness.

- **“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)**

⁵ Bo Jackson, *Sports Illustrated*, 1995

- o I love that little phrase: shadow. Shadows aren't real things. Shadows can't hurt you.
- o **Barnhouse.** He got the truck; we get the shadow. Jesus took actual death; actual aloneness; actual separation from God, for us.
- o **So now, in him, I know that I'm never alone:** My everlasting father is with me. I have nothing to fear about the future: my wonderful counselor is turning it all for my good.
- **Many of you want your circumstances** changed this Christmas. What if there was **something even greater** than changed circumstances?
 - o What if it was **to know that GOD WAS WITH YOU:** to know your **Everlasting Father**; to be **reunited to the Mighty God**; to have him as your **Wonderful Counselor**; to know the **Prince of Peace**?

You can know that!

- If you **are a believer** here today... in anxiety or despair... take heart... God is with you.
- If you are **not a believer** here today, I have bad news and good news: **Bad news:** God is not with you. He loves you deeply but is not with you. You are utterly alone.
- **Good news:** He's offered himself to you, if you'll receive him.
- See the first part of the verse? **"Unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given."** **Given. You have to receive him as a gift.**
 - **John 1:12.**
 - You can't **earn the presence and approval of God.** You don't get it by coming to church enough; giving enough money; being good enough; praying enough. It's a gift.
 - You have to receive it that way.
 - Have you ever **received him**, personally?
 - Do you have that **personal relationship with God**? Do you **want it**? You can if you will receive him.

One last thought:

- When we're children we find it easy to accept the perfect story of Christmas in the Bible. *Of course* the wise men came, *of course*

the angels appeared, *of course* a virgin had a baby. But as we grow older, we find the Bible's Christmas story suspicious and a lot of us end up writing it off as myth. It goes in the same category as Santa Claus, a piece of Christmas legend that we're just too mature for anymore.

- It's not a cute story.
 - o Mary, the Virgin, really did conceive.
 - o Jesus really did live and die. He wasn't a wise sage telling inspiring stories around a campfire. He was God, born into poverty, dying on the cross as a substitute for your sin.
 - o The first apostles believed this message so fervently they gave their lives for to spread it.
 - o Today, there are still people all around the world giving their lives to bring it to others...