

God's Presence in the Flesh

Luke 2:1–7, Matthew 1:22–23 | The Story of Mary & Joseph

- Welcome Everyone
- Please wish everyone a Merry Christmas.

Opening Humor: The nativity play was going as planned, and Joseph and Mary went from house to house, knocking on the doors and asking if there was room for them. As they continued to get "no room" answers, a little child's voice called from the back, "YOU SHOULD HAVE BOOKED A ROOM ONLINE!" bringing the house down.

- Summarize the Advent Series.

OPENING STORY: Tonight, I want you to think briefly about a time when you were glad you were not alone. It's your experience, so it can be anything you want. I could share many examples with you, but one of them is when I sank a boat on Lake of the Ozarks in the middle of summer, July 31, 2004, to be exact; it was during a time scientists would call a "Blue Moon." It's a special moon because it's the second full moon of the month, and it's bluish in color.

CONTEXT

For centuries, God's people waited for God's good and just King to arrive. For centuries, they longed for God's presence to come to earth and stay. They were tired of being alone. Yet, the moment of God entering the scene is presented, even anticlimactically:

And while [Joseph and Mary] were [in Bethlehem], the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:6–7 ESV).

God's presence in the flesh is like a baby in a feeding trough. The most unlikely couple raised him—Mary, miraculously pregnant before marriage, and Joseph, her fiancé. Mary and Joseph were a poor and seemingly lonely pair, but they responded to God similarly: They believed when God promised his presence through this miraculous baby (Matthew 1:24; Luke 1:38).

And so Jesus was born, the one called "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Interestingly, we don't read the name "Immanuel" once we move beyond the birth narratives about Jesus. And yet, the whole of Jesus' life flows from that name. "Immanuel," God with us.

Jesus was born like us—vulnerable, weak, and dependent on his family. He needed his mother's milk to stay alive. He needed swaddling clothes to keep his body warm (Luke 2:7). In his perfect humanity, he needed others to care for him, just like us.

Jesus lived like us, enjoying life's pleasures and enduring moments of tedium. He played games. He got bored. He wanted a good meal (Matthew 11:19). He also fasted when God called him to it (Matthew 4:2). He was able to sleep like a stone (Matthew 8:22–23). He also stayed up all night, at times, praying to his heavenly Father (Luke 6:12). He spent decades learning the blue-collar trade of his earthly father. He forged friendships with people, laughing and weeping with them, just like us.

Jesus suffered like us. He got sick. He grew tired. He lost loved ones (John 11:33–36). He experienced the heartbreak of betrayal (Matthew 26:14–16). He fought against temptations to sin (Hebrews 4:15). He felt the brokenness of this world and the limits of his own body, just like us.

Then Jesus did something you and I haven't done. He did something very human but still very foreign. He died.

Humans die. We all know this. But we haven't done it yet. Don't skip past that irony: Jesus has experienced something universally human—but that we living humans haven't gone through yet.

That's a bit ironic—and a lot comforting. Because even in his death, Jesus died as God with us (1 Corinthians 19–21). God himself experienced the full weight of the curse, the shadow of death, the loneliness and horror of death so that we would be able to approach death knowing we are not alone.

And then, remarkably, Jesus did something utterly unlike us: He rose from the dead. This miraculous event is something we've never seen. But we will. The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus' resurrection as the "first fruits," a promise of a future

reality (1 Corinthians 15:20). Joining Jesus in his death, we will join him in his resurrection life. Jesus became like us so that we could become like him—alive forever.

OUTLINE

Central Idea: In his birth, his life, his suffering, and his death, Jesus was Immanuel, "God with us."

- A. Jesus was born as "God with us"—vulnerable, weak, and dependent on his family (Luke 2:6–7), just like us.
- B. Jesus lived as "God with us," enjoying life's pleasures and enduring life's moments of tedium (Matthew 11:19). Just like us.
- C. Jesus suffered as "God with us," getting sick, growing tired, losing loved ones, fighting temptations, and experiencing his bodily limits (Hebrews 4:15). Just like us.
- D. Jesus died as "God with us" (2 Corinthians 5:19–21; 1 Peter 3:18). None of us have done this (yet). But if we trust in him, we can approach our death with confidence that death is not the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SMALLER GROUPS

1. In what part of your life does it seem hardest to believe, "Jesus has felt this, too"?
2. Where do you feel weak, vulnerable, or dependent on others? How does it change your perspective to know that Jesus, in his perfection, felt the same way?
3. Which element of Jesus' earthly existence—his birth, life, suffering, or death—speaks most to you? Why?