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God With Us

Wow! Its December! The Christmas carols fill the air! ` We are definitely on the down hill slide toward the big day with what seems to be ever increasing speed.

We begin our thoughts today with this well known prophecy from Isaiah chapter seven verse fourteen (NLT).

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All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

In my childhood home a small red box was always near the table ready for family devotions.

It was called a promise box. It was full of little cards with a scripture verse on one side and a promise from scripture on the other.

Each person in turn would read one of these little cards.

These are really promises from God's promise box because they are taken from his word.

And there are many promises associated with Christmas and many promises made possible by Christmas.

There are three things that I wish you to take note of today from this verse from Isaiah. The first is that while Isaiah was certainly a prophet, he had no special status such as royalty, nor is there any evidence to suggest he was a priest or one of the religious authorities of the day.

So, God was using an ordinary guy to deliver amazing predictions about the coming messiah. God seems to have made a habit of selecting ordinary people for extraordinary things.

The second point to notice is the promise. The promise, the promise of a coming Messiah. The promise of a baby who would be called Immanuel.

Remember Hebrew names usually meant something and were used to describe the characteristic of the person being named.

So the baby the promised messiah would be named Immanuel a name which means God with us.

So, out of God's promise box Isaiah speaks concerning the promised messiah.

The first hint of a saviour came way back in Genesis, and seven hundred more years would pass before the Messiah that Isaiah predicted would actually arrive.

So, I'm sure that many would have doubted God's promise, doubted whether it would ever come to pass.

But God was faithful and you and I, while we may struggle with God's timing, can be assured that what he has promised he will indeed deliver in his timing.

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Peter, just a few years after Jesus left this earth apparently sensed that some of his listeners were beginning to doubt God's promises concerning end times and so in II Peter 3:9 (NLT) we read:

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

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But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

So, Christmas and the coming of the Messiah is a reminder to us that God does keep his promises.

They may not fall in alignment with our sense of timing but he will keep them.

The third thing that I want you to notice from this verse is that name Immanuel. The name that actually means God with us.

God's presence with us in a new way. The promise and delivery of his presence, an important promise kept.

A promise of his presence that is available to us today. And if there is one thing that we as a church need more of it is the presence of Jesus in our church, in our programs, and in our lives.

We as evangelicals believe in the inspiration of scripture. So, we believe that the Holy Spirit was instrumental in inspiring Isaiah to use the name Immanuel associated with a characteristic of Jesus.

But why this name in addition to all the other names? For example, In chapter nine verse six (NLT), Isaiah uses other names for the messiah.

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*For a child is born to us a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Well, the simple answer is that each of the names provided by the Holy Spirit to Isaiah, describes a separate aspect of the ministry of the coming messiah.

So, the concept of God being with us, God's promise of his presence being with his people is an important point that Isaiah wants to reaffirm with his readers.

There is a promise imbedded in this prophecy that the coming messiah would bring the presence of God closer to his people.

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As Moses is transferring his leadership role to Joshua he says to him in Deuteronomy 31:8 (NLT)

Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

Now God by definition is omnipresent, a fancy word to mean that God’s presence is everywhere.

But in Old Testament times there were situations where God’s presence was manifested in much more intense ways.

Some examples: on Mount Sinai during the receiving of the ten commandments; in the wilderness tabernacle; and in the Holiest of Holies in the temple.

But God here is saying through the prophet Isaiah that his presence will be manifested in a new way in that the Messiah, God’s own son would be present on earth.

And even after Jesus returns to glory, we are given a reminder that that this promise of God to provide his people with his presence through Jesus would continue through the Holy Spirit.

In John chapter fourteen verse sixteen (NLT) Jesus gives this promise from God’s promise box to his disciples.

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And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.

So, one of the promises of Christmas is that God's presence would be with us in a new way. A new and personal way delivered by the messiah.

And that promise remains in effect for today, and for people who welcome and seek the presence of Jesus in their lives and in their churches, God will still manifest his presence in powerful amazing ways.

And the other thing I believe that is well worth noting is that God throughout history has continued to work with, and work through, ordinary people manifesting his presence in amazing ways.

We sometimes put ourselves down thinking that God only manifests his presence and power through big name evangelists, or big name worship bands or big name bible teachers.

But the record of scripture shows that this presence and power is available to the ordinary believer who is genuinely seeking his power and presence in their lives.

And collectively his power and presence is available to any group of people whether small or big who are seeking and welcoming his presence in their churches.

Let's switch our thoughts now from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah to a prophet named Simeon who appears briefly in the New Testament.

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In Luke 5: 25-32 we read:

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

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That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So, when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

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“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

This story, this prophecy, is an interesting one. Simeon is apparently not a priest, just one of the common people.

But Simeon was a man who had been genuinely seeking God. Longing for God’s presence to be manifested in the promised messiah.

God’s promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit is obviously being manifested in Simeon’s life and ministry.

And so, God in his wisdom confirms to this ordinary guy his promise of the soon coming of Messiah, confirms that he would live to personally see him.

And as Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple, the Holy Spirit confirms to Simeon that the Messiah has arrived.

God working again in miraculous ways through ordinary people. Confirming his word in miraculous ways.

Now let's shift to another one of the Christmas accounts, the exchange between the angel and Mary.

Please note here again God choosing a young woman of no particular social status. She is not from any royal family, but simply one of the working class. An ordinary person chosen to carry and mother the baby Jesus.

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In Luke one beginning to read at the twenty-sixth verse (NLT)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

So, God is continuing to use ordinary people for great things.

But notice once again the last few words from the text. Notice these words of promise, the promise of God's presence. *"The Lord is with you!"*

There is an important point here to remember for all of us. Whatever God calls us to do, wherever he calls us to serve he promises to be with us.

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And if we skip down to verse thirty-seven we find yet another promise reaffirming God's commitment to his word:

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For the word of God will never fail.

Throughout the entire life of Jesus here on earth we see his presence primarily among the ordinary people of the day.

Consider the announcement of his birth. A birth of the long awaited Messiah, not announced first to the High Priest or the religious establishment but announced to the least auspicious people of the day.

Announced to shepherds, their occupation considered to the least in the social status pecking order. Imagine for a moment being one of those shepherds.

Imagine the sense of God's presence as an angel appears to them!

Consider his selection of disciples, ordinary blue collar workers of the day. Fishermen and tax collectors, hardly the who's who of the community.

But most importantly consider the very nature of his ministry.

Jesus spent little time in the temple or with predominate religious figures of the day. He spent most of his time in the presence of his disciples and the ordinary folks who had come to listen to him speak about the Kingdom.

Consider for a moment how Jesus would choose to spend his last few hours before the crucifixion.

It was Passover time. A time when a lot of activities and celebrations took place with family and with in the environs of the temple.

But Jesus chooses not to be with his family. He chooses not to be part of the activities at the temple, but rather he chooses to be with his disciples.

He chooses to be present to be with those who have chosen to follow him, to commit their lives to him.

Surely there is a message in his example. A message that says he longs to be with those who have chosen to follow him and long for his presence like Simeon longed for the presence of the promised Messiah.

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Luke's gospel gives us some insight into how Jesus wanted to celebrate the Passover.

In verse eight of chapter twenty-two Jesus says to his disciples "Go and prepare the Passover meal so we can eat it together."

Notice there the desire to be with his disciples. Later on in the chapter he says "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins.."

Jesus once again indicating his desire to be in the presence of his followers the ordinary guys that he had chosen to be with him.

And I believe that his character has not changed. He is just as anxious to be present with you and I today, ordinary people who have chosen to follow him.

And I believe that he longs to have us as his followers to seek and welcome his presence during this Christmas season.

Communion day is a time for self examination. We are encouraged to allow the Holy Spirit to examine us, to give us a check up and give us an honest appraisal of our spiritual status.

How do you think he would rate us on our seeking and welcoming the gift of his presence?

Band to play communion song

Prayer and self examination

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Jesus said, “I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won’t eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.”

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Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.”

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He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Eating of bread together..

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After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.”

But of course the greatest promise of Christmas was the promise to bring a solution for our sin problem.

God has revealed through Isaiah that a Messiah was promised. A saviour was promised. A redeemer was promised.

Isaiah would not live to see that prophecy of his fulfilled. It simply wasn't God's timing. But eventually God's timing would come. Eventually the promised messiah would be born of an everyday woman.

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Galatians 4:4 Reads:

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.

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And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Partaking of the cup together,

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