

**God With Us:
December 11, 2022**

Paul Harvey once told this story; [1 Birds]
This is about a modern man,
One of us, he was not a scrooge,
He was a kind, decent, mostly good man,
Generous to his family,
Upright in his dealings with others.

But he did not believe in all that
Incarnation stuff that the Churches proclaim
At Christmas time.

It just didn't make sense to him
And he was too honest
To pretend otherwise.

He just could not swallow
The Jesus story
About God coming to earth as man.

I'm truly sorry to distress you,
He told his wife,
But I'm not going with you
To church this Christmas Eve.

He said he'd feel like a hypocrite.
That he would much rather stay home,
But that he would wait up for them.
He stayed, they went.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car,
Snow began to fall.
He went to the window to watch
The flurries getting heavier and heavier,
Then went back to his fireside chair
And began to read his newspaper.

Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound.
Then another and another.
At first he thought someone
Must be throwing snowballs
Against his living room window.

Well, when he went to the front door,
He found a flock of birds
Huddled miserably in the snow.

They had been caught in the storm
And in a desperate search for shelter
They had tried to fly through
His large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures
Lie there and freeze.

He remembered the barn
Where his children stabled their pony.
That would provide a warm shelter --
If he could direct the birds to it.

He quickly put on his coat and galoshes,
Trampled through the deepening snow
To the barn,
Opened the door wide,
And turned on a light.

But the birds did not come in.

He figured food would entice them in
And he hurried back to the house,
Fetched bread crumbs,
Sprinkled them on the snow
Making a trail to the yellow lighted
Wide open doorway of the stable,

But to his dismay
The birds ignored the bread crumbs,
And continued to flap around helplessly
In the snow.

He tried catching them,
He tried shooing them into the barn
By walking around them waving his arms --
Instead they scattered in every direction
Except into the warm lighted barn.

Then he realized they were afraid of him.
To them, he reasoned,
I am a strange and terrifying creature,
If only I could think of some way
To let them know they can trust me.

That I'm not trying to hurt them,
But to help them.
How?

Any move he made tended
To frighten them, confuse them.
They just would not follow.
They would not be led
Or shooed
Because they feared him.

If only I could become a bird myself he thought.
If only I could be a bird and mingle with them

And speak their language,
And tell them not to be afraid,
And show them the way
To the safe, warm barn.

But I'd have to be one of them,
So they could see and hear and understand.

At that moment the church bells began to ring.
The sound reached his ears
Above the sound of the wind.

He stood there listening to the bells.
Listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas.
And he sank to his knees in the snow.

So. Joseph's world was **SUDDENLY** thrown into chaos. **[2 Joe's Dream]**
Before all this...
He had a plan.
He was engaged...
To a woman he loved...
Life was good.

But then...
Without warning...
He was informed...
That his beloved...
Was with child.

And here's the problem.
He knew he was not the father.
He knew what that would mean...
He knew what people would think...
How they would react...
To this premature pregnancy.

They would blame him.
They would blame her.
They would have nothing...
But criticism...
And anger...
And disappointment.
For both of them.
And their families.

Culturally...
They would be completely engulfed...
In a web of guilt and shame.

BUT. All those fears were not TRUE.
The truth was stranger...
Than anything the gossiping masses...
Could imagine.

This was the fulfillment of the promise.
This was a plan implemented by God.
This was an event...
That was going to change...
Not just their lives... but...
The entire world.

Mary knew.
What was happening...
But that was it.

Her family didn't know.
Her church people didn't know.
Her larger community didn't know.

And most importantly...
In this moment...
Joseph did not know.

So. In order to save his reputation...
And in some twisted way...
To protect the woman he loved.
He decided to dismiss her...
Quietly.

In that decisive moment.
God intervened.
An angel appeared to Joseph...
In a dream.

Don't be afraid to marry Mary.
The child is from the Holy Spirit of God.
She will bear a child.
You'll name him Jesus...
Because HE IS THE SAVIOR.

And this baby fulfills...
The all the promises...
God made through the prophets.

But especially these words...
The virgin will conceive a son...
They will name him EMMANUEL. **[3 Emmanuel]**

Emmanuel is a Hebrew word...
And it means GOD WITH US.

So why?
Why did GOD do it?
Why was it necessary for God to become one of us?
Why did Jesus lay aside all of his majesty...
And power...
And glory...

To be born in a humble manger...
To be born in the messy flesh...
To be born like one of us?

Well... there are at least three reasons...
That I can think of...

The first is...
So we could know God
God's heart.
God's intention.
God's promise.

The book of Hebrews begins...
Long ago God spoke to our ancestors
In many and various ways
By the prophets,
But in these last days
God has spoken to us by a Son.

I mean...
The way to make your intentions...
Absolutely clear...
Is to communicate directly...
To another person.

We think technology has helped us communicate...
If anything all these modes of not talking...
Have led to more misunderstanding...
More miscommunication.

Social media...
Text Messages...
Even voice calls...
Can be misinterpreted.

But when you see someone... in the flesh... face to face.
When you stand in their presence...
And see their body language...
And hear their words... and their inflections...

You can understand their intentions.

In the gospel of John... chapter 14...
Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father
And that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered:
"Don't you know me, Philip,
Even after I have been among you
Such a long time?
Anyone who has seen me
Has seen the Father."

When Jesus was with us...
God was with us...
In the flesh...
To see...
To hear...
To touch...
And to know.

The famous scientist...
Robert Oppenheimer once said
"The best way to send an idea is to wrap it up in a person."

The theological word for all of this... is incarnation, **[4 Incarnation]**
Which means... "in the flesh."
Jesus was the incarnation of God.
Jesus was the way that God sent God's "idea" to humanity;
There was at that time... and still today... is no better way!

The second reason for Emmanuel... God with Us...
Is so that God might know us.

The bible says...
God knows everything about us...
Even the number of hairs on our heads.

It is possible to KNOW a lot about someone...
But not to really UNDERSTAND who that person is.

Part of the human condition
Is that we THINK
We know other people
Their intentions...
Their motivations...

Without really understanding who they are...
Their life...
Their situations...
Their joy...
Their sorrows.

We make a lot of assumptions about people...
And you know what happens when you assume...

We think everyone experiences life
The same way we experience life.
And that's not true.

If we really want to understand...
We need to immerse ourselves...
In their reality.

That's what God did.

There's a story about...
A man named Joseph Damien
He was a missionary during the 1800's.
Who ministered to people with leprosy
On the island of Molokai, Hawaii.

Those suffering grew to love him
And sincerely appreciated the sacrificial life
He lived out before them.

One morning
Before Damien was to lead daily worship,
He was pouring some hot water
Into a cup
When the water swirled out
And fell onto his bare foot.

It took him a moment to realize
That he had not felt any sensation.
Gripped by the sudden fear
Of what this could mean,
He poured more hot water
On the same spot.

No feeling whatsoever.
Damien immediately knew what had happened.
As he walked tearfully to deliver his sermon,
No one at first noticed the difference
In his opening line.

He normally began every sermon with, "
My fellow believers."
But this morning he began with,
"My fellow lepers."

And even though that was life changing...
For all the people involved...

In a much more significant way Jesus
Came into this world
Knowing that he gave up...
The glory of heaven...
To become one of us...
On earth.

And in the course of his life...
He found out... for himself...
What it meant...
To be one of us.

He would live... Laugh... Cry...
Suffer... and die...

All to know us.

To be us.
To love us.

Which leads... to the third and most important reason...
That Jesus became human...
One of us...
Is so that...
He could fulfill God's plan... **[5 Salvation]**
Of Salvation.

That he you and I would have the opportunity...
To be restored to God...
Once and for all.

He died as a substitute for our sin.
He gave his life... for ours.
For mine.
For yours.

One more story.
A grandfather found his grandson
Jumping up and down in his playpen,
Crying at the top of his lungs
When the child saw his grandfather,
He reached up his little chubby hands
And said, "Out, Grandpa out."

It was only natural for the grandfather
To want to respond...
To want to save his grandchild...
To reach down to lift him out of his predicament,

But as he did the child's mother stepped in
And said "Dad... don't you dare...
He's being punished...
He's in time out...
You let him be"

The grandfather was at a loss
He didn't know what to do.
The child's tears and chubby hands
Reached deep into his heart.

But he didn't want to undermine...
His daughter's rules...

But love found a way.
The grandfather could not take the grandson
Out of the playpen,
So he climbed in with him.

He was with this child he loved...
Even in his punishment.

Philippians Chapter 2...

Being found in appearance as a man,
[Jesus] humbled himself
And became obedient to death --
Even death on a cross!

That's it... right?
That's what this Incarnation...
The Emmanuel...
This God with Us...
Is really all about.

It's about what our Lord Jesus...
Did for us at the cross.
Even though we like to focus...
On all the happy wonderful things...
About Christmas.

This is the real meaning of Christmas.
In leaving heaven for earth...
Jesus climbed in with us.
Lived and died for us.
Jesus was God.
Jesus was us.

As the Bible says...
The Word was made flesh,
And lived among us.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.