

**“God with Us”**  
Matthew 1:18-25  
Dec. 23, 2007, 9 am

I have lots of fears of being a parent. Diapers are a big one. I don't do well with stuff like that – and apparently poop abounds when you have a baby. I worry about not being a good father, not being there enough, or not giving my child enough love or having enough to make him happy, and pushing my own ideas instead of letting my son grow up to be the man God created him to be. I have lots of worries like that.

But I also worry about being a disciplinarian. There is a razor thin line it seems between being mean and being firm, a line between being loving and lenient, a line between being responsible and being overbearing. I realize that many times I will do the right things but I also realize that even those times might come off unfair or mean to my child. This is the bad part of being a parent. I get it.

I want to almost tell him from the start, day 1, “Look, I remember being a kid. And there was a lot of stuff I wouldn't do again if I was your age. I wouldn't eat dirt, I wouldn't put candy up my nose, I wouldn't talk during school, I wouldn't hate naps, I wouldn't wear boots with shorts, I wouldn't tell my dad he was stupid, I wouldn't scratch my chicken pox, I wouldn't look for Christmas presents, and so many other things. I remember this stuff! And when I try to stop you from doing it, it is for your own good. You will make plenty of mistakes without me there to stop you. But let me help you avoid the stuff I know is a mistake.”

I want to tell him all that, but I know he won't listen. How could he understand? I didn't.

I think this is a little bit how God feels. If you look back at the book of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, there are long, long lists of rules God gives the people. Most don't make any sense these days. Why not eat pig? Why not make clothes of two different materials? I want to think God was telling the people what I want to tell my son – “I know better. Trust me, don't do this stuff.” It is hard looking back and seeing these rules and not scoffing.

I used to scoff at my father's advice too. “Let your car warm up when it is cold; your car will drive better.” That was good advice before computers started being put in cars. “Always carry 20 dollars with you.” Good advice still, but with everyone basically having credit card readers, it is not such a necessity. My dad's advice now sounds like some of God's rules; some make perfect sense and some seem kind of irrelevant.

But I get how God must have felt as the people He gave the rules quickly ignored them. They didn't trust Him. They feared Him, sure, but they didn't trust. Their faith was in lightning bolts, not manna (thus, one day they hoarded the bread from heaven and it all was spoiled.)

The Book of Job demonstrates this so wonderfully. Job cries out to God in his anguish and pain, “If only I could speak to the Lord face to face, then I could make Him understand that this is unfair. If I could get Him in a court room, I could plead my case and all would see that I am a

just man being treated unjustly.” In a nutshell, Job was saying, “God, you wouldn’t do this to me if you knew how it felt.”

The psalms, the cry of the Lamentations, the wailing at the rebuilding of the Temple and realizing it wasn’t terribly inspiring, in all these moments we hear the people saying, “You wouldn’t be so mean if you really understood how it feels.” The Bible is filled with the voices that sound like children pouting as they stomp off from their parents after receiving their punishment. “It’s not fair!”

God’s answer to this is genius. I will go down there. I will be one of them. I will live with them, and show them my love. I will show them what I mean when I say, “Follow the rules.” I will even die for them so there won’t be this barrier between my people and myself. I will go from beginning to end just like one of them. And they will know me. They will no longer be able to say I don’t understand. They will no longer say that I am unfair because I will experience the worst a person can go through. I will experience hunger, homelessness, pain, loss, financial struggles, loneliness, hatred, and even torture.

They say when you are speaking to a child, the best thing you can do is get down on their level when speaking to them. If they are laying down, lay next to them. Get down on your knees and talk to them. Make eye contact. Don’t stand over them like an ogre, but show that you care by getting on their level.

That is the message of Christmas. God got down on our level. I’m sure it wasn’t a fond experience. Who could leave heaven and not want to be back home? And yet our Lord never begrudged an instant.

That is the proclamation that we see in Isaiah that is repeated here in Matthew. This is our Lord’s proper name – Immanuel, God with us. That is who He is.

What is interesting is that it is through Christ that we are able to be closer to our Lord than any other time since the Garden of Eden. You see, the only barrier that existed between God and creation was that of sin. And because of Christ’s passion on the cross, that separation was removed. The barrier was one of our creation, and was not God’s desire. Here these words of Jesus as he entered the Holy City:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

God has always wanted to be with us, but we were unwilling and unable to bridge the gap. It was only in Christ, Immanuel, that we were able to fully experience God with us – both incarnate and infinite.

We hear this morning a reminder that we come to celebrate far more than a child born unto a virgin. We come to hear more than an angels song. We come to celebrate God with us. God is with us and will never be apart from us. Through Jesus Christ, the power of sin has been destroyed. Through Immanuel, we remember the promise of our Lord before he went back to heaven – “And I will be with you always, even until the end of the age.”

God is with us. That is what we celebrate as we come to Christmas. This is what we have spent these four weeks preparing for – the celebration of God coming to be with us in the form of a child who would grow to be our Savior.

Our Father did what so often we wish we could do: He came to tell his children, I understand. This is why I asked you do this. Here, let me show you how to really live. Let me show you what true love is.

This is what we celebrate on Christmas day. God cared enough to get down on our level to show us that he loves us. That is something worth celebrating. That is a God worth knowing.