

December 24, 2010

Mt. 1:18-25; 2:13-14, Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20

“God is WITH us!”

So, here we are. It’s Christmas. The angels have made announcements, they have spoken in dreams, they have sung of an amazing birth. And a baby has been born in a barn, laid in a manger.

What does this story of the baby in the barn teach us? The story of the baby in the barn says God is REALLY **WITH** us.

The all-knowing, all-powerful God became human. This God came in human flesh, arriving as a helpless baby.

Imagine telling this to someone as if you were one of the shepherds: *Hey, didja see that little tyke out back? Yeah, the little guy bawling out back in the barn? He’s lying in the feed trough, wrapped in some blankets. His folks don’t have much, but I guess they’re managing all right. Go see him. No, I mean it! Because he’s GOD. Yeah... the BABY is God. I don’t mean God’s out there in the barn WITH him. No, seriously, he’s GOD.*

Why would God DO this?? (Read Philippians 2:5-11.)

God DID this because we needed him to. The Grand Sweep of Scripture depicts the ways God sought to be in a relationship of love with his people. First, directly, in the Garden of Eden. That didn’t work out so well. Then God spoke through his agents: Moses, the judges. Then God spoke through prophets. The people mostly killed them. So, God made a decision. “I guess I should just go down there. I’ll go to them. I’ll be one of them. I’ll be WITH them.”

God could only be a real companion to us by being like us. God was not a powerful figure in the shadowy corners of the barn, waiting, like a superhero, to zap Herod’s forces when his soldiers arrived to kill all male infants and toddlers. No, God WAS AN INFANT that Herod was trying to kill, dependent on the obedience and faith of his earthly parents as God spoke to their hearts, advising them to keep the child safe.

God, Emmanuel, “God-with-us”, is here now, through God’s Holy Spirit. God is present, right here on earth, attentive, watching, listening, murmuring to our hearts and minds. God goes through everything we go through. Are you stressed? Christ feels that stress with you. Are you filled with joy? God is dancing in that joy. Are you heartbroken? God’s heart broke when yours did. God delights in our company always, and is ready to hear whatever we have to share.

There’s more the baby in the barn teaches us: not only did God become like us; God put himself at our mercy.

Think about the Christmas story.

Mary met an angel, who told her she would bear a special child of God. She had some questions for the angel; she didn’t see how that could be, but she finally said, “All right.” What would have happened if Mary had replied, “I’m sorry, but I just don’t have enough data at this point to make such a momentous decision. I think I just have to decline.”

Joseph learned his fiancée was pregnant. He didn't want to embarrass her, but planned to break the engagement quietly. But the angel in his dream told him to marry her- because the child was a special child of God's own Spirit.

When he woke up, he trusted in that dream, and became the earthly father of Jesus. What would have happened if Joseph had awakened thinking, "What a crazy dream I had! I must have eaten something that didn't agree with me!" and then he went ahead and broke his engagement.

What would have happened if Joseph and Mary had not again accepted the message of a holy dream, and stayed in Bethlehem, rather than fleeing to Egypt? The Christ child would have been killed by Herod's troops.

So. Not only did God become like us; God put himself at our mercy. God wants to have a relationship of love with every one of us. He became flesh and became vulnerable to us, so that we might see him, know him, and love him. None of us are **forced** to do any of this. We are **INVITED** to see, know and love him. But we decide, like Mary, like Joseph, what we will do.

Oh, and if we decide we just don't have enough date yet to do that, if we decline God's offer, well, God is **STILL** with us. He's here. He just is.

God is **WITH** us. And the **US**, we learn through the Scriptures, is **EVERYONE**. Greek, Jew, slave, free, male, female, all of us. God is **WITH** us. Merry Christmas.