



**Sermon: Christmas Presence – Todd Goldschmidt**

Saturday Christmas Eve Service 6:00 pm – December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – At [Living Hope Lutheran Church](#)

It's almost present time! Ask any child, "What's the best thing about Christmas?" and after the obligatory "Jesus" answer—if you even get that—they'll probably shout, "The presents!" We spent last weekend at my wife's family's annual Holiday get together up on Whidbey Island, affectionately known as, "The Monda Christmas." Thirty-six people—one of them a beautiful baby girl named Vivian whose first-thing-in-the-morning smile is so huge her dad, Steve, said, "Her face isn't big enough to hold it"—enjoyed each other's company, crafted ornaments, and exchanged some truly amazing gifts that clearly reflected the love and thoughtfulness of the givers. Even for adults, it seems that the best thing about Christmas might well be the presents.

But if that's the case, it's entirely wrong. Sure, Christmas means that we give and receive presents, but that's not the true meaning of Christmas. The *presence* of Christmas that we truly celebrate is a singular gift from God Himself. In fact, it is the gift of *God Himself*. Christmas means that God is present with us, and His **CHRISTMAS PRESENCE** is the greatest gift of all!

God's prophet Isaiah speaks of the long-promised Messiah by the name *Immanuel*, a Hebrew word that means simply, "God with us." God is here with us, present in our midst, at all times.

That's what wicked King Ahaz of Judah wanted to hear, needed to hear—that God would be with him. And although Ahaz lived 2700 years ago, he was actually quite contemporary in his religious thinking. He wanted God to be with him, but on his own terms. Judah was about to be invaded, and the king was worried. But instead of turning to God and his promises for comfort, security, and peace, Ahaz took matters into his own hands. He made a deal with the king of Assyria. That's like little Switzerland striking a deal with communist China—a tiny aquarium fish lost in the ocean seeking a shark's help. Bad news.

So Isaiah called Ahaz back to his own God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Ahaz' own ancestor, the great King David. Ahaz was in the line of the promised Savior. Isaiah told him, "Go ahead ask the Lord for a sign." But Ahaz waxed pious, "Oh no, I couldn't possibly do that. I wouldn't want to put the Lord to the test." Which is funny, because with all of his unbelief and rejection of God, that's all he'd been doing—putting God to the test!



“All right then,” responded Isaiah, “the Lord’s going to give you a sign anyway. But it’s not going to be what you want. A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel, God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). King Ahaz must’ve laughed out loud. “A baby! I don’t need a baby. I need chariots, swords, cruise missiles, unmanned drones, and a majority in the house and Senate! I need help and you come in here rambling about a pregnant woman—a virgin no less—who will conceive and give birth to a son? What kind of deliverance is that?”

It’s clear to us today that this Scripture, this sign, was a promise of our Savior Jesus Christ who was to come. Praise God that He fulfilled this age-old promise! The Bible says, “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 5:8-9). Christ has come, and He is with us! Even today—*especially today*—we need to know that God is with us. Spiritual enemies threaten us. Crime and violence surround us. A shredded economy undermines financial security: job losses, free falling home values, huge budget deficits, bankruptcies, foreclosures. Then add health issues and relationship problems to the mix. Causes for concern are never in short supply.

Our sin also threatens us. That God would come here to be one of us, to be present in our midst, is a terrifying prospect for sinful people like you and me. Our transgressions are countless, breathtaking in their sheer volume and audacity. We worry—and rightly so—that our sins will put us outside of God’s love, beyond His grace. We worry—and rightly so—that our guilt will destroy our eternal future. We know we need to repent, to confess our countless sins to this holy and righteous God. But we need a sign—a sign that God still loves us in spite of our sins; a sign that God forgives us.

And here it is: Christmas presence—the incredible gift of God Himself to us—wrapped not in shiny bright paper and colorful bow, but wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This is no ordinary child. This is Immanuel, God with us; God here for us. The Christmas presence of God with us means that the Christ-child’s cradle leads to His cross on Calvary. The One who came forth from Mary’s womb would one day come forth from Joseph’s tomb to give the forgiveness of sins and new life with God!

If there is one truth to take home with you tonight, it’s this: regardless of the gifts you receive this Christmas—be they expensive and digital, practical and simple, homemade or store-bought—the greatest gift of all is spiritual, powerful and eternal. It’s God’s gift of His presence; it is Immanuel, God with us. God Himself come to be our Brother, our Savior. Immanuel, God with us: in the homeless shelters; in the cancer ward; in the intensive care unit; in the broken heart and happy home; in the middle of the night when you can’t sleep; in the midst of every problem, challenge, and difficulty you face. Immanuel, God with you when things overwhelm you and you don’t think you can go on. Immanuel, God with you from the moment of your conception to the moment of your triumphant entrance into heaven. Immanuel leads you to lie down in green pastures and refreshes you beside quiet waters. He restores your soul. Immanuel walks with you through the valley of the shadow of death, and He who will wipe every tear from your eyes in heaven.

**Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Class 9am)**

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Immanuel: God with us! God with loved ones near and far, with those who are already by His side in heaven, talking face to face. Immanuel, God with us, wherever we are. Every breath we take is done under his watchful, loving eye. He even knows the number of hairs on our heads!

Looking for a sign? A sign of God's love for you? A sign that things aren't just random and cruel, but that life has purpose and meaning? Here it is: Christmas presence, God's presence; God himself with us. "A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel, God with us." So it came to pass. And God's presence continues. Thank God this Christmas for the indescribable gift of Himself. Immanuel, God with us tonight, in days to come and for eternity. The best thing about Christmas is the presents—the presence of Immanuel. Amen.

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