

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

**Date:** 12 December 2021  
**Services:** Across the diocese  
**Series:** Who is Jesus?  
**Passage:** Matthew 1:23  
**Title:** God with us

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- The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**” (which means “**God with us**”)
- Who is **Jesus**?
- He is **God with us**.
- Is there anything about that, that strikes you as **amazing**? //
- Over the first two weeks of Advent, we’ve seen that Jesus is **God in skin** – the eternal Son of God left the glory of heaven and eternity to step into time and space as a **human being** – like us in **every way** – except without **sin**. /
- And that Jesus is **God making himself known** – that is, we are not left in the **dark** about what God is like – and we saw last week that when we see **Jesus’** heart of **compassion**, and his **grace** and his **authority** and his **forgiveness** – we see God **himself!** //
- But now this phrase – Jesus is ‘**God with us**’...
- God **dwelling with us** – **living with us** – **present with us** – **here with us** and **FOR us... alongside us...**
- The Word became **flesh** and made his **dwelling** among us... we read in **John 1:14**. //
- There are two areas I want to explore with you about what this means for us.... For in this phrase I think we see **two** things very **clearly**:

1. **Jesus’** heart
2. Our **need**

- First then, how this phrase reveals:

**1. JESUS’ HEART**

- ...and of course as we see **Jesus’** heart – we see **God’s** heart.
- But I want you to think about where Jesus’ **first** coming us falls within human **history**
- God had created the world and humankind and everything was very **good** until you get to just the **third** chapter in the Bible and the humans decide to do their own thing / which spelled **disaster** for all creation // the effects of which, we live with - around the **world** and in our **lives** today...
- By the **sixth** chapter of the Bible, God was **grieved** that he had made humankind....!
- God established a particular relationship with **Abraham** and the nation of **Israel** which would come from him... so that their relationship with God and the way they lived in **covenant relationship** with **God** would be a **light** to the **world** – would show the **way** to **God**..... //
- But that went **pear shaped**. /
- When they **got** to the promised land – they did not live faithfully – they married the **inhabitants** of the

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land they were meant to drive **out** and the mixed **their religion** with that of the **inhabitants...**

- And eventually God said – **enough!** – you’re **OUT** of my promised land – which was subsequently – at the hand of God - overtaken by the **Assyrians** and the **Babylonians**. /
- But – but – God is not **finished** with his people
- **Why?**
- Because he **loves** them //
- Even their **rebellion** cannot quell that **love**
- they **deserve judgment**, but he will offer **mercy**.
- In the book of the prophet Jeremiah – after 29 chapters recalling the **sordid** nature of Israel’s **sinfulness**, he says to them ‘*I have **loved** you with an **everlasting love**’.*
- He had said earlier ‘my people have **forsaken** me’ (2:13)
- He had said ‘you have **polluted** the land with your vile **whoredom**’ (3:2)
- He had said ‘O Jerusalem, how long shall your **wicked** thoughts lodge within you’ (4:14); and
- ‘This people has a **stubborn** and **rebellious** heart’ (5:23). ///
- But then he comes and says in Jeremiah 31:20 – Is Ephraim (another term for Israel) my **dear Son?** //  
Is he my darling child?  
For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him.  
Therefore, my heart yearns for him.  
I will surely have mercy on him. //
- Isn’t that **wonderful?**
- My heart **yearns** for him. I will have **mercy** on him. //
- That remains God’s **heart** for you... he **yearns** for you –
- The word ‘heart’ – translated elsewhere – **bowels** – he feels it there...
- It speaks of the **greatness** of the **heart** of God...
- 29 chapters of **judgement...** but the **yearning heart** of God **delivers** and **redelivers** sinners in desperate need, a rescue that they cannot even begin on their own. //
- I don’t know how you **perceive** God...
- How you picture him when **praying?**
- How you think he **feels** about you – really?
- if you’re anything like me – the perception we often have is of God who is **mean** and distant – waiting to **catch us out** and trip us **up... overly stern...** especially when we **fail** and **rebel....** //
- And it is true that God cannot **tolerate** sin...
- But it is **magnificently** true that his heart **yearns** for us...  
even **when** we sin...

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if you're a parent – you know just a **little** of how that feels when your child **rebels** against **you**... and in your heart – you yearn for them to learn – and to do what is right... and to return to you in love...  
//

- As Dane Ortlund says in a chapter in Gentle and Lowly – which inspired my thoughts in this section - he yearns not for the **Facebook** you or the you that you project to **everyone around you**...

Not the you that you **wish** you were.

He yearns for the **REAL you**.

The **you** / underneath **everything you present to others!** //

- We **resist** this.
- We think of him as being like us. We feel him to be stern and stand offish when we've offended him – because that is how **we** are with others.
- We picture him that way because that feels appropriately **serious**.
- And of course – God does take sin **more** seriously than we **ever** will, but his heart for us doesn't **change** according to how **good** we've been...
- Yearns for us so much – the **virgin** will conceive and give birth to a **son**, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, **God with us**.
- so because his heart yearns for us, he **came**, not only to be with us in **life**... but **with** us and **for** us in **death**...
- There at his **death** – at the **cross** - the **judgement** of God and the **mercy** of God meet in a **staggering sacrificial act**...
- On the **cross**, says Dane Ortlund, we see what lengths God went to **satisfy** his yearning for us...  
He went **that far**.  
He went all the **way**.  
The **blushing effectiveness** of **heaven's bowels funnelled down** into the **crucifixion of Christ**. //
- God **with** us
- Revealing God's **yearning** for us
- A yearning so deep, he wanted to  **dwell** with us
- A yearning so deep, he wanted to **die** our **death**.
- Repent of your **small** thoughts of God's **heart**.
- Repent and let him **love you**. ///
- But second – the phrase 'God with us', reveals:

## 2. OUR NEED

- I don't know if you're familiar with the words of the song from Sting or the Police  
*Everyone I know is lonely and God's so far away  
And my heart belongs to no one  
So now I sometimes pray*

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*Please take the space between us and fill it up some way*

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- ... Referring to sense of **aleness** in a world full of **people**
  - Research has shown that one of the great needs in western society today is **loneliness**...
  - And even this Christmas I'm certain that among the crowds and among the promise of activity and gatherings at Christmas there will be people – some watching/here today - who will feel dreadfully **alone**.
  - And to misquote Charles Dickens – Christmas will be for many both the **best** of times and the **worst** of times.
  - many **lonely** people will even **now** be trying to fill the space...
  - To fill it with **entertainment** – and there's plenty of options.
  - To fill it with **stuff** and there's plenty in the stores.
  - To fill it with **money** – and there may be a little left in the bank.
  - To fill it with **qualifications** and there are plenty with universities with open doors.
  - but they find with **all of these things all put together** they **cannot close the gap or fill the spaces...!!**
  - and maybe they'll plan a **move** or a change of **job**...
- And some – in a fit of rebellion say 'I think I need to new **lover**' – I'm out of here – I'm **sure** the answer must lie in this... //
- and that is where Matthew 23 comes in...
  - And they will call him **Emmanuel** – which means '**God with us**'.
  - *Please take the **space between us and fill it up some way**...* cries the song
  - And the Bible says "and he will be called **Emmanuel** – which means God with us" - the one who **fills** the **space**.
  - You see it's not **religion** that fills that **space**.
  - It's not **ideology** that fills that **space**
  - It's not honest **endeavour** that fills that **space**.
  - There is only **one** way in which the space may be filled and that is to be **filled** with the **person** of the **Lord Jesus Christ**
  - And the **good news** of Christmas is this – that the space between a **holy God** and **sinful men and women**, like **you and me**,  
...has been **bridged**... by God who has **lowered down a pontoon bridge**,  
and the **pontoon bridge** has come to us not in a **religion** or an **ideology**, but the **pontoon bridge** has come in the form of a **person**. /////
  - novelist Thomas Wolfe connects the intense loneliness of his **own** life to this **universal** aspect of **humanity**.

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- He writes:

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.

When we examine the moments, acts, and statements of all kinds of people -- not only the grief and ecstasy of the greatest poets, but also the huge unhappiness of the average soul...we find, I think, that they are all suffering from the same thing. The final cause of their complaint is loneliness.
- The central fact of **human existence – aloneness** – in a world full of **activity** in a world full of **people**...
- God has lowered a **pontoon bridge** and the pontoon bridge is the **person** of **Jesus**...
- Jesus himself knew what it was like in the worst of times to be **abandoned** by all his **friends** as they fled the **moment** he was **arrested**...
- And then on the **cross** he cries from that cross that he even feels abandoned by God as he bore our curse – My God, My God, why have you forsaken me...
- But he **died** to close the **gap** between sinful humankind and a holy God.
- ...so that we might approach God with **confidence**... and never find ourselves alone **again**.
- ...neither your **success**, nor your **possessions**, nor your **qualifications** nor your **aspirations**, your **hopes**, your **dreams**, your **family**, your **religion**, is able to close the gap...
- and Jesus says I've been there and I've done that... I've closed the gap so you might never **know** it – **feel** it – **again**. ///
- So we draw near with **confidence**... because Jesus has **opened the way** into his Father's presence... and closed the gap now, for all **eternity**. //
- It's **fascinating** and **wonderful** isn't it that Matthew's gospel opens with this phrase speaking of the arrival of the Lord Jesus – that he is **God with us**...
- And then **ends** 28 chapters **later** – with the promise from Jesus' own **lips** – that he will **WITH US** – he'll **continue** to be with us – even to the end of the **age**...!
- ...a promise we know was **fulfilled** in the **gift** of the **Holy Spirit** who takes up **residence** in us...
- God – the **Word** made **flesh** and dwelt **among** us...
- God the **Holy Spirit** – another **comforter** – who now dwells **SO** close... that we can say he dwells **within** us.
- **Still with us**...
- With us in our **joys and sorrows**
- **Good days and bad**
- With us in **temptation**
- With us in **frustration**
- With us in **loss** and **sadness** and **grief**...
- With us in **sickness**...
- With us in **death**...

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- With us to **transform** us into his **likeness** /
- With us to empower us to say '**no**' to sin and to put him **first**, and to **serve** and **encourage** our **brothers and sisters....** to work for his **honour**, and to tell **others about him...** ///

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As I close – let me remind you of one further appropriate image –  
In Genesis 3 – God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening.

Conscious of their rebellion Adam and Eve **hid** from God...

But turn over to the second last chapter of the Bible – Rev 21:3 – what do we read - Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

He will dwell with them...!

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God...

What was lost in mankind's rebellion – wonderfully addressed in Jesus' **first** coming – and **ultimately** and **permanently** restored when **Jesus comes again!**

**Who is Jesus? – God with us...**

...a **glorious reality** which **reveals**

God's great **yearning heart**, and

our great **yearning need**.

Turn to God this Advent...

...bring your yearning **need** to his yearning **heart**...

And find **again**... all the blessing God has for you in Jesus – Jesus who is STILL with us – by his Spirit – to the end of this age – and then for all eternity!

<b>WHO IS JESUS?</b>		
<b>ADVENT &amp; CHRISTMAS 2021</b>		
<b>NOV 28</b>	God in skin	<b>Luke 1:26-38</b>
<b>DEC 5</b>	God making himself known	<b>John 1:18</b>
<b>DEC 12</b>	God with us	<b>Matthew 1:23</b>
<b>DEC 19</b>	God dealing with our sin	<b>Matthew 1:21</b>
<b>DEC 25</b>	Saviour of the world	<b>Luke 2:1-14</b>

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