

GOD WITH US Matthew 1:20-23

Last week we talked about the greatest event that ever occurred in human history up until that time, the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. God becoming flesh and dwelling among men (John 1:14). Only the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension can match its greatness, and all four make up the indispensable foundation stones of our faith. But it all started with the Incarnation.

Recently I ran across some amusing thoughts by Max Lucado about the experiences that some individuals could have had as they related to Jesus as the only God/Infant Who ever lived. Lucado expresses these thoughts in a series of questions. They went similar to these: To the wise men he would have asked, "What was it like to worship a baby?" To the innkeeper he might have asked, "Did you ever learn Who it was that you turned away from sleeping in your inn? And if you did, what did your wife say?" To the shepherds it might have been, "Did it ever cross your mind that the Baby in the manger would grow up and be a shepherd who would be murdered to save His own sheep?" To Mary here's a good one: "When He was a baby, did He ever cry when He didn't need a nap or He wasn't hungry?" And here's a few when Jesus got older. "Mary, did Jesus ever make anything less than a 100 in school?" "Did you ever look up from your prayers and there Jesus was, listening?" And I especially like this one, "Did you ever try to count the stars with Him, and actually count them all?" One of my favorites is a two-part question to Joseph. The first part: "Did you and Jesus ever arm wrestle when He was little?" And the second part: "Did He ever let you win?" But my favorite question has to be to John the Baptist: "Hey, John, what'd it feel like to baptize God?".

Well, last week we learned just why that the Incarnation is indeed the first foundation stone of our faith; why without it we have no Christian faith at all. And in a nutshell it is because if Jesus were not God in the flesh then He could not have been a worthy sacrifice for our sins – He would have been a sinner just like us. And we would still be in our sins and headed for eternal Hell. Now, that Jesus was a worthy sacrifice for sin is reason enough to rejoice in the Incarnation. But today I want to plow deeper into this precious truth, for God has given us so many more blessings in addition to our eternal salvation, all because He is with us and I want us to see them and rejoice.

There are four wonderful blessings that we have this morning because Jesus has come as God in the flesh. And the first blessing that we have is the most obvious, and that is, **God is present**. God is truly with us! Deut. 4:7 says, "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" And beloved, when you stop to think about it, this is truly a mindboggling thought. The God Who dwells in Heaven, the God of

glory, has laid aside His glory, and as Paul said, took upon Himself the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of man (Phil. 2:7). Think what condescension it was for God to become human flesh! Think what dignity that God brought to mankind when He became flesh. What honor, that the King of glory would become one of us! And to think, when Jesus referred to Himself He could have called Himself the Son of God, and sometimes did, much more often He called Himself the Son of Man. Charles Spurgeon said that when Jesus called Himself the Son of Man that He hung royal stars upon our breasts and placed a halo around our heads.

You see, the concept of God dwelling among men in Jesus' day was a foreign thought to the Greeks and Romans. They had their pantheon of gods that they worshipped, but they worshipped them from afar. For the pagan gods were aloof from human affairs; they pretty much didn't know and didn't care. Zeus, Hermes, Apollo and the rest lived way up on Mt. Olympus, and they would never condescend to live among men, except to occasionally prey upon an attractive woman or man for fornication. And the gods of the heathen would never show compassion to mortals who were in distress, either. For how can you show compassion if you don't know of the hurts? And if you had troubles you could only turn to other humans for support. But our God is not a God Who has isolated Himself from us. He is a God Who is present. And because He is present He sees and knows all about us.

Do you remember the story of Sari and Hagar in Genesis 16? Sari and Abraham quit trusting God for the son He had promised them, and Sari gave her maid to Abraham so they could help God out with His promise. But after Hagar conceived she despised Sari, and Sari kicked her out. And while she was wandering out in the wilderness God came and spoke to Hagar and sent her back home, promising her a son named Ishmael. And Hagar called out to God and said, "You are *El Roi*, which is 'the God Who sees'".

Friends, God is the God Who sees all of His children, every moment of every day. We see this truth displayed in the OT and the New. In the NT, Jesus saw His disciples as they rowed for their lives on the stormy Sea of Galilee, and at 3:00 a.m. came walking on the water to them. Jesus saw Peter when Satan was attempting to sift him as wheat. In the Sermon on the Mount we read that Jesus sees when no one else sees when we give and when we do good works (Matt. 6:1-6). In the OT we learn that God sees our sin. When David sinned with Bathsheba and then had Uriah her husband murdered, David thought that had pulled off the perfect cover-up. But 2 Sam. 11:27 says that the thing that David did displeased the Lord, for God saw him. Friends, when no one else does, God sees your sin! But God also sees our godly hearts and desires. 2 Chron. 16:9 says that the eyes of the Lord run two and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are perfect towards Him, that is, those who have passionate hearts to know and serve Him.

Friends, whoever you are, you can be sure that God knows what is going on in your life. Are you involved in some secret sin? Is it pornography, or is it reckless spending behind your spouse's back? God sees. Young people, is it drinking behind your parent's back, or do you go to websites like *ECheat* to get your term papers, or regularly cheat by other means? God sees.

Maybe you are burdened down today with burdens that you feel are just about to crush you. No one knows the depth of your pain, for it concerns things too deep and too intimate to share with your very best friend, whoever that may be. This week I learned about two people who have recently tried to commit suicide. One is 17 years old and one is 10. Can you imagine? Oh, but there are countless others who are just as burdened but do not have the courage to pull the trigger or swallow the pills. Do you sometimes feel this way, and nobody knows but you? And there may be other things going on that you do share, but the one with whom you share does not really know how you feel. But beloved, God knows! Oh, thank God that we have a God who knows all about us! He sees each tear that we cry (Ps. 56:8). He sees each time we need a guardian angel to protect us from the hounds of hell that would devour us (Heb. 1:14). And He knows because He is the God Who is **present**.

And that brings us to another blessing that comes because of the incarnation I want us to see. We see that God is not only **present**, but that **God is personal**. Friends, it is one thing to be present and another thing to be personal. Many husbands and wives are present in the same house but they are not very personal. I have a pastor friend who lived in the same house with his wife for months, but they rarely even spoke to one another. She lived on one end of the house and he lived on the other. They were present with each other but not personal, until God miraculously restored their marriage.

Beloved, God is a personal God! We see it all the way through the Bible. God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Enoch walked with God, and one day took him by the hand and led him all the way up into Heaven. Noah walked with God, and Noah was so close to God that God spoke and told him to build a boat one and a half times as long as a football field on dry land and His voice was so clear that Noah did it. And I'd say that God got pretty close up and personal with Moses when He spoke to Moses face to face on Mt. Sinai, wouldn't you?

But beloved, God didn't quit walking with His children when the OT era ended. Over and over in the book of Acts we read where the Holy Spirit spoke to the apostles and told them what to do and they did it. The Holy Spirit told Philip to go and witness to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29). The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision telling him to go and befriend the newly converted Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10). God spoke to Peter through a trance and told him to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:9f). The Holy Spirit spoke to the church at Antioch and said, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them (Acts 13:2). And more

than once the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul saying, “Don’t go to Asia, don’t go to Bithynia” (Acts 16:6-7).

But does God still speak as clearly as this today? He certainly does. One night back in July I woke up about 2:30 one morning and the first thought in my mind was, “Get up and pray”. Now, the Lord has taught me from experience that when you have that thought in the middle of the night you might as well go ahead and get up and do it, for the thought is not going away, and it surely is not the devil who is prompting you to get up and pray. So I got up, went into another room and began to pray. And during my prayer I sensed God saying, “Get dressed and go down to the Chevron station”. Well, I wasn’t so quick to respond to that prompting. I didn’t want to get out at 2:30 in the morning and go anywhere. So I just kept on praying. But the Lord would not leave me alone. I kept hearing the Holy Spirit speak to my spirit, “Go down to the Chevron station”. So I finally said, “OK, Lord, I’ll go”. So I got dressed, drove down to the Chevron, walked in, and began talking with the attendant. And soon after we began to talk she said, “I’m so glad that you came this morning. I just got robbed about 45 minutes ago, and I needed to talk with someone. God sent you”. Friends, God is a personal God Who speaks directly to His children!

Now, let me say three things about hearing the voice of God. First of all, **God speaks to all of His children**, every single one of them. Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”. So friend, if you are truly saved, then the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you! If you are living in sin He is convicting you to repent, to turn from your sin and to follow Him again. If you do not have habitual, unconfessed in your life, He is speaking to you about becoming more and more Christlike and about your service to Him. But if you are truly saved, God is speaking to you.

Secondly, **God speaks most often in a still, small voice**. In 1 Kings 19, when God revealed Himself to Elijah, He didn’t do it through the wind, or an earthquake, or the fire, but through a still, small voice. And that’s the way He speaks most of the time today. God speaks first and foremost through His Word. God speaks through sermons and Sunday School lessons. God speaks through Christian radio and Christian books. God speaks through godly conversation with Christian friends. God speaks through a rainbow and a sunset. God speaks through the thoughts that He puts in our minds as we are driving down the road. So don’t be waiting for a sign in the sky or a two by four upside the head to hear the voice of God. Listen for the still, small voice of God.

And that brings me to the last thing about the voice of God. **God speaks loudest to those who want to hear Him**. David writes, “The Lord is near... to all who call upon Him in truth (Ps. 145:18). James writes, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and WE will come to him and make Our home with him”. Beloved, God does not have his favorite children, but God does

have his intimates. God is closest to His children and is most personal with His children who will draw close to Him. So if you feel aloof from God, if you do not experience His sweet peace and hear His voice as you wish you did, you have no one to blame but yourself. Do as James exhorted. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. And the place to start is by doing what the Psalmist said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). Turn off the TV. A little TV is OK, but when you watch Paula Dean, Wheel of Fortune, and Andy Griffith six hours a day you've gone too far! Turn off the secular radio station. Slow down and set your mind on things above and not on things of the earth (Col. 3:2). And beloved, you will hear the voice of God! For our God is not like the gods of the Greeks, isolated in the Heavens. He is a God Who is **present**, and He is a God Who is **personal**.

There is a third blessing that we have from the Incarnation I want us to see. **God is present, God is personal, and God is also provider.** God is here to meet our needs. When our Lord Jesus Christ came to dwell among men, in His first sermon He stated why He came in no uncertain terms. Luke 4:18:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
 Because He has anointed Me
 To preach the gospel to the poor;
 He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted
 To proclaim liberty to the captives
 And recovery of sight to the blind,
 To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

Beloved, God is not a God Who is present and Who perfectly understands but can do no more than hold your hand and say, "Don't worry, everything will be alright". Sometimes that is all we can do or want to do, and the person who is hurting is just as needy as ever. I am not minimizing our efforts to help the hurting. I'm just saying that our efforts so often come up short. But beloved, our God is almighty to meet every need in our lives! Jesus said, "I came to bring the gospel to the poor". That is, I came to save the poor in spirit; I came to save the lost. He said, "I came to heal the brokenhearted. I came to deliver those who are bound in sin, I came to heal the sick, I came to deliver from Satanic oppression". And beloved, that's what He did!! There was not one person who ever came to Jesus in faith that was not saved, healed, or delivered. There was not one hungry multitude with Him that went away hungry.

Do you have a need in your life today? Are you a lost sheep? Do you need to be saved? Ask Jesus to save you. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost". Are you one of His sheep? Then go to Him and ask Him to meet your need. David said, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want!" Ask in faith, ask with a heart that is free from all known sin. Ask, and you shall receive! For God is with us and **God is provider**.

We have seen that **God is present**, that **God is personal**, and that **God is provider**. But I want us to see yet another blessing because of the Incarnation, which is the culmination of them all. And that is, **God is peace**. After the angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, do you remember what the angelic host who joined him shouted out? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth...", What? Peace. Peace and good will toward men. I want you to ask you something. Can you think of anything in this entire world that human beings yearn for more than peace? You might argue that a starving man might yearn more for food, or that a freezing man might yearn more for clothing; perhaps or perhaps not. But it would be correct to say that when death and eternity is staring us dead in the face, the greatest need of every man is peace. Peace and rest in the depths of his soul. Billy Graham expressed the desire of every living soul when he said, "I know where I've come from. I know why I'm here. I know where I'm going, and I have peace in my heart. Every living soul longs for peace.

But friends, you know as well as I that most people don't have real peace. And it is because real peace comes from only one source. Real, lasting peace comes only from Jesus. What were the names that Isaiah wrote that Messiah would be called? Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*. And Jesus was forever transforming lives with His peace. He forgave the woman who washed His feet with her hair and said, "Go in peace" (Luke 7:50). He healed the woman with an issue of blood and said, "Go in peace" (Luke 8:48). The night before He died He said to His disciples, "Peace I give unto you, My peace I leave with you..." (John 14:27). And the night after His resurrection He appeared to the disciples as they were so very confused and afraid and said, "Peace be unto you". And this was the continuing message of the church. After Pentecost Peter preached to those in Cornelius' house, "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace thorough Jesus Christ..." (Acts 10:36). Paul wrote to the Romans, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace..." (Rom. 10:15).

Young people, your home life may be the pits and love life may be non-existent, but Jesus will still bring you peace. Or your home life may be great and you may be dating the best looking girl or guy in school. But you'll have no peace without Jesus. And it's the same way with you adults. When life is gruesome or when life is awesome, there is no real peace apart from Jesus Christ.

Someone wrote a poem years ago that says it all about God's peace:

When Jesus as lord I had crowned
 My heart with this peace did abound:
 In Him the rich blessing I found –
 Sweet peace, the gift of God's love.

I want us to see one more truth before we close. Because of the Incarnation, because God is with us and has transformed our lives, praise God, **God is pictured**. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord". As you and I who are saved continually look upon the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, as we gaze upon Him and are enraptured by all of His matchless glory, God says that we are changed in to the same image from glory to glory. We radiate His glory through our lives to a lost and dying world. And I don't know about you, but that is what I long for my life to do.

A few weeks ago I received a blessing I'll never forget. Mark, my youngest brother and I, went to Atlanta to see an elderly friend of ours named Joe Raffa. I have mentioned Mr. Raffa to you several times before. He was a Christian counselor that both Mark and I had seen years ago and who still means so much to both of us. As we were about to leave Mark began to share with Mr. Raffa all that he had meant to him, and then Mark began to pray. And as I told our Wednesday night group, Mark Griffin prayed Heaven down. I had never heard a prayer like that out of my brother in all of his 50 years, and have heard few prayers like that in my life, period. We were on holy ground! But here was the result. First of all, I know that God heard my brother's prayer and answered from Heaven. But there was another result. After Mark prayed he left the room for a few minutes, and Mr. Raffa and I were discussing how well that Mark was doing. And Mr. Raffa looked at me and said, "He is full of God!" Full of God! OH, what greater thing could be said about anyone? And beloved, it is all because God is with us, in Jesus Christ His Son. Praise be unto His holy Name.