

Introduction:

- "Early in his administration, President Ronald Reagan came out of the Hilton hotel where he had spoken and was walking a short distance to his car when he heard a noise—pop, pop, pop—like firecrackers going off. His Secret Service bodyguard shoved him into the nearby presidential limousine and jumped in on top of him. Reagan felt a crushing pain in his ribs ... "He began coughing up blood, and they rushed him to George Washington Hospital. He was walking to the emergency room when he got lightheaded and weak in the knees. He was also having great difficulty breathing. The next thing he knew he was lying face up on a gurney, being wheeled into the hospital. Later as he was going in to the operating room, he looked at the surgical team and quipped, *'I sure hope you're all Republicans.'* ... "Reagan's difficulty breathing increased. His lungs were working, but no matter how many times he took a breath, he couldn't get enough air. He began to panic and finally blacked out. "When He regained consciousness some time later he felt someone, evidently one of the nurses, holding his hand. He later wrote, *'It is difficult for me to describe how deeply touched I was by that gesture. It was very reassuring just to feel the warmth of a human hand.'* ... He began asking, 'Who's holding my hand?' There was no answer. 'Who's holding my hand?' he asked again. Again, no answer. 'Does Nancy know about us?'" **APPLICATION** "When you strip everything away, life really comes down to this: knowing we are not alone, knowing somebody cares, knowing we are loved." God became a man to do that. Through Jesus we know we are loved, that God cares, and we are not alone.
- *""Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us.""* (Matthew 1:23, NKJV)
- God with us requires three things on our part. Recognition of God, Faith in God, And response to God.

I. God With Us Requires Recognition We first must recognize God is with us.

A. Back ground.

1. When we read the Christmas story we can't forget the fact that God has been silent for over 400 years. While He was silent, in that time period, four different empires ruled over the nation of Israel.
2. We also know that God had promised Israel that He would never forsake her. Dt 31:8,16; 1 Sam 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Promises to Abraham, David, prophets etc. *"I will never forsake you."*
3. Have you ever felt forsaken by God? It happens and why wouldn't we feel forsaken when life is hard and God is silent. That is when our faith is really tested..."will I continue to believe that He is with me." The power of the words, *"Emmanuel God with us"* comes with the recognition: God in our lives. Their power, at the movement of God towards us ,becomes very powerful.

B. *"God with us"* requires that we recognize that fact: "God is with us."

1. Recognition is the perception of something as existing or true. It is that "Ah ha! moment!" "I see!" It also means the identification of something as having been previously seen, heard, known, etc. So, those who were looking, at the time of Jesus birth, like Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:34, 36) they SAW! They recognized.
 - a) All the others of the Christmas story are given clues that point the purpose: He was born to die, that I might live!
 - b) Another way of looking at this is the term revelation. God reveals Himself to us. But we have to recognize the revelation. God with us, God drawing us to Himself.
 2. IE. Escape Room. In the escape room you are looking for clues to solve the problem and thereby get out of the room you have been locked in. So in the room you look for clues. Every clue gives you that "Ah ha!" moment. It causes you to look for more until you have made the discovery! Many people feel locked into a place in life in which there is no escape but Jesus has come to set us free. Free from sin. Free from guilt. Free from shame. If you start looking for a way out, you will find clues that point to Jesus...God with us.
- C. The Great news of Mt 1:23 is: God is the One who is revealing Himself to us!
1. He is not giving any clues. He is declaring what He has promised (all the OT quotes), and what He is doing. And He is doing it so clearly one would think He wants us to notice...His presence! God with us is the promise of His presence.
 2. All of the angels in Luke, including Gabriel, who come to Zachariah and Mary. They were representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven. They were reps, not God. Ie. Think about that the next time you desire to see an angel...he is just a rep. You just as well go straight to the top! And you can do that now because of Jesus.

II. God With Us Requires Faith

- A. What do you do with the revelation of God? For many who receive the revelation of God they believe. Those that do not believe do not find Him. Faith is what gives us access to God.
1. *"And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6, NLT) It is the believing that gives you the connection. Ie. It is like being out with your spouse and they are on FB, giggling, smiling, sparkle in their eye...and you are thinking...really?
 2. If you do not have faith then you will miss your time of visitation...habitation by God.
- B. Two examples of this in Christmas story
1. Zachariah
 - a) Zachariah gets a visit from a really high up rep. This is not a support call from some far away with a thick accent.
 - b) Zachariah is given an amazing prophetic word. Luke 1:13-17. "God has heard your prayer; you are going to have a son; call him John; He will be great in the

eyes of God; filled with the Holy Spirit; he will turn Israel back to me; and he will prepare the way for My Son!"

- c) Note Zachariah's response: "*Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."*" (Luke 1:18, NLT) Zachariah is almost in the same spot as Abraham! It was his chance to shine...priest of God. He blew it. He wanted evidence before he would believe. If you have to have evidence you do not need faith. He wavered in unbelief.
- (1) He voices his doubts because because he is considering all the prior years of his reality. Christians do that too.
 - (2) "Then the angel said, *"I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news!"* (Luke 1:19, NLT) I.e. Who do you think I am, some angel at heavens support line? NO! I am Gabriel! I stand in the Presence of God! And He would like to stand in your presence!
 - (3) A lesson to learn here: It is possible to demand too much evidence before you believe God's promises. It is not wrong to want evidence...just do not ask for it. If you have to have evidence you do not need faith.
 - (4) There is another lesson to learn from Zechariah's unbelief. It was preceded by a life of godliness and followed by a life of godliness and he still obtained the promise.
2. Mary
- a) Mary also gets a visit from a very high up rep! Gabriel.
 - b) She gets an amazing prophetic word, you have found favor with God; you are going to conceive and have a son; call Him Jesus, Yeshua, God saves; He will be great; Son of the most high God; Sit on the throne of His Father David; and His kingdom will have no end!
 - c) Lets compare her response to that of Zachariah. *"Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."*" (Luke 1:34, NLT) She is not doubting. She is not asking for evidence. She wants a little bit more explanation.
 - d) So another lesson we learn is that it is OK to want and to ask for explanations when we are perplexed.
 - e) In fact Luke writes of her later, when she visits Elizabeth: *"You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."*" (Luke 1:45, NLT) "Unlike that husband of mine."
 - f) May we have faith like Mary: *"Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her."* (Luke 1:38, NLT)
3. "Note the contrast: Zechariah says, How can I know for sure?—Mary says, How can this be? Zechariah asks for *more evidence*; Mary asks for an *explanation*. Zechariah says he can't be sure; Mary says she can't understand. Mary receives at least a partial

explanation, but Zechariah receives a rebuke and is made dumb by the angel." John Piper. Moral of story, be like Mary not Zachariah when you hear about Jesus. God with us demands faith!

III. God With Us Requires A Response

- A. When you recognize God and follow that with faith, it requires a response. Faith requires action.
1. Zachariah did not believe and had a wrong response...literally. He was made deaf Lk 1:62 and mute.
 2. Mary had faith and her response was, "Let it be unto me according to your word."
- B. God with us ... happens in life in business as usual. I want us to see where each of our characters today were when they were interrupted. They were doing life...as usual. They had no idea how much God was with them, even though God sent a very 'high up' rep to speak to them about Emmanuel, God with us.
1. Zacharias, "*When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah.*" (Lk 1:5, NLT)
 2. "*Mary was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph*" (Lk 1:27). NLT
 3. "*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.*" (Luke 2:8, NLT)
 4. To us the reader, because we already have the knowledge of the story, we are enthralled immediately. But to the characters they were just doing life.
 - a) So much of our interaction with God is not the amazing God encounters but the fact He encounters us in our day to day activity.
 - b) I like to think of Him this way: God is uniquely at work...even when life is difficult and God seems to be silent.
 - c) Each one of our characters could have felt very insignificant. But listen, when God is with you, your insignificance goes away. The more you live with the knowledge of His presence the more your significance comes from Him. You suddenly realize you are important because He is with you!
 - d) Your confidence soars when you know He is with you. IE. Like the basement illustration last week. The car maintenance illustration. Ie. Rugby, "With you!" You can take the hit because you realize you are a part of something bigger. You realize you are not alone. Confidence comes to you and you are able to act!
 - e) With confidence comes the courage to act. Recognizing God is with us give requires a faith and faith requires response.
- C. God with us, the promise of Presence
1. The Shepherds - this is phenomenal! "*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.*" (Luke 2:8, NLT) Business as usual, but we are talking about the response of faith. The response of faith will always lead you

into the presence of God. Heb 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please him.
What happens in their BAU life?

- a) Luke 2:9 An angel of the Lord appears
 - b) Luke 2:9 the glory of the Lord surrounds them NKJV
 - c) Luke 2:11 the angel says, the Lord has been born in Bethlehem.
 - d) that is almost confusing...we are here and the angel of the Lord and glory of the Lord is on us...yet the Lord was just born in Bethlehem
2. Their response..."I gotta see this!" So they go see the baby.
 3. The Presence always leads to joy and joy to worship. *"The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."* (Luke 2:20, NLT)

Conclusion:

- Zachariah, though he doubted, ends in faith. He was comforted. His tongue was touched and his response was prophetic songs.
- Mary responded in faith to the angel. All things are possible for those who believe. Comfort of God being near. A faith response brought the presence into her.
- Shepherds have a major God encounter! They go and see just as the angels had said. God in a manger. A faith response took them into the presence.
- What is your response today?
 - Will you recognize God with you today?
 - Will you in faith turn to Him today?
 - Will you respond and live for Him forever?