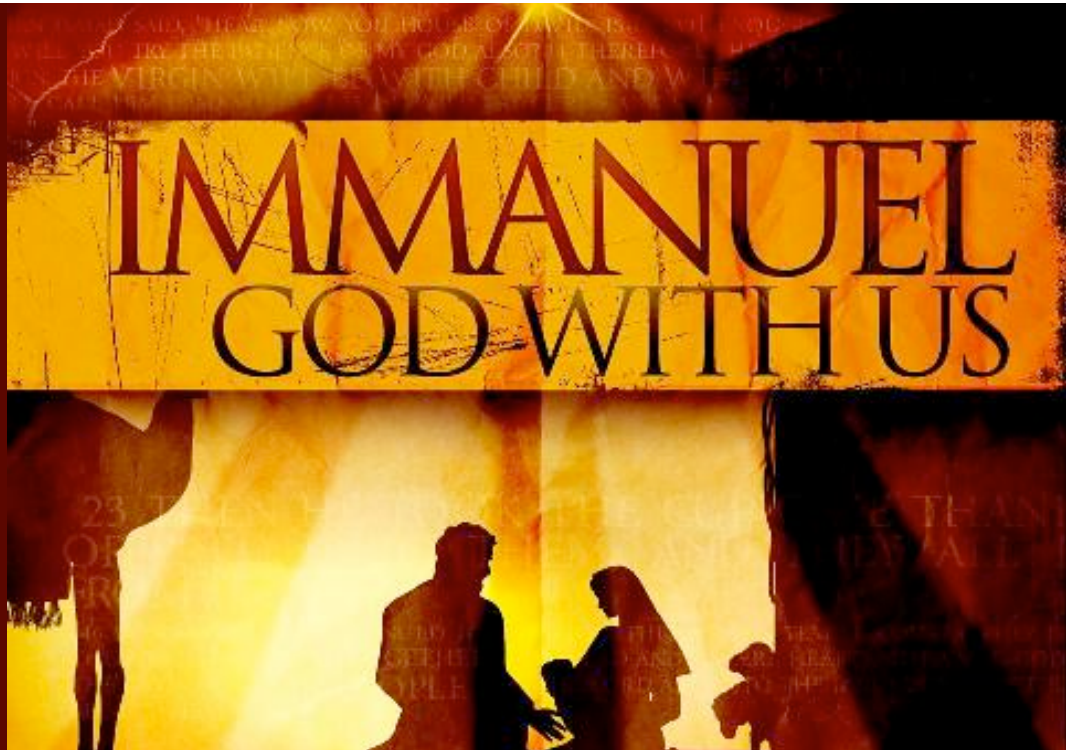


# MESSAGE MINDER

November 28, 2010

Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which means "God with us."

Matthew 1:23



## God With Us

By Jonathan Stone

The bible begins with the beautiful, mysterious picture of God brooding over the waters of His creation. As we read what follows we hear of God shaping the formless and filling the emptiness. We see Him making “the two great lights” and creating “the monsters of the sea.” As we continue we sense that we are reading something better described as stunning ancient poetry than a detailed blueprint. The power of God in the beautiful account of creation in Genesis is astonishing. Yet, it is His nearness in the midst of that mighty splendor that makes the passage truly breathtaking.

God’s handiwork continues with the creation of man. His creation is complete, but His work is not finished. Most importantly, his nearness does not wane. God continues to draw close to man, parading the creatures in front of him to be named. And even after He creates the woman, bringing about the full community of humanity, He is still there drawing near to them.

However, in the midst of such serenity calamity strikes. Humanity rebels against God and suddenly sensed their own vulnerability. In their guilt they attempt to cover themselves and, most tragically, they “hid themselves from the presence of God.” But again, God’s nearness does not wane. Instead He draws near and reorders the situation. He gives them new boundaries to live by and a God-given covering for their newfound shame.

Time and time again we see this theme throughout the bible. Humanity continues to make devastating choices that bring dire consequences. All hope appears to be lost. But at just the moment that we want to give up on the situation God shows up in the most shocking ways. He renews His nearness with His people, even uses their sinful mistakes to bring about His love-filled plan of redemption. The whole routine leaves us with wonder: *What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him (Psalm 8:4)?*

When we arrive at the New Testament the story offers its most outrageous development. God humbles Himself, takes on the flesh of humanity, and dwells among us. He does not come in radiant splendor, but in the likeness of a humble servant. And most surprising of all, we now know that God’s nearness not only comes *to* us, but also comes *through* us.

The story continues to twist and turn with surprising developments. Yet, God’s nearness, once again, never wanes. As we reach the end we get a promising glimpse of God’s final plan, and by now we should not be surprised. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Revelation 21:4). Thus, the scriptures begin and end with the same simple message: *Immanuel, God With Us.*

**O house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.**

Isaiah 2:5

## The Four Weeks of Advent

- 1) The theme of the first week of advent is *Hope*.  
The first candle of the advent wreath (traditionally a purple candle) is lit. For many years the faithful looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. We look forward with the eyes of faith.
- 2) The theme of the second week of advent is *Love*.  
The second candle of the advent wreath (traditionally a purple candle) is lit. We know that God is love. We remember with thankful hearts the gift of Jesus, who came as a babe in a manger, lived and loved among us, was killed on a cross, and arose! Love endures forever.
- 3) The theme of the third week of advent is *Joy*.  
The third candle of the advent wreath (traditionally a pink candle) is lit. Prophecy has been fulfilled. The long-awaited Messiah has come. Joy is in the mood of all earnest seekers.
- 4) The theme of the fourth week of advent is *Peace*.  
The fourth candle of the advent wreath (traditionally a purple candle) is lit. Christ is the Prince of peace, come to reconcile us with God and others. Christ helps us to see that peace is possible.

## First Sunday of Advent Prayer

Let us pray in advent with longing and waiting for the coming of the Lord:

Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge--because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.**

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

