

## Jesus: God With Us

*Matthew 1:18-23*

**M**any of the products we use have been sold to us primarily because of the slogans they've used in advertising. And some of them stick with us, even long after the commercials have ceased to air. For example, see if you can finish some of these well-known slogans:

Pork: "The other white meat"

I've fallen: "and I can't get up"

American Express. Don't leave "home without it"

Maxwell House Coffee. Good "to the last drop"

Plop, plop, fizz, fizz: "Oh what a relief it is"

Manufacturers spend hundreds of thousands, even millions, of dollars each year in designing names and slogans for their products that will stick in the minds of the consumers. Wendy's had "Where's the beef?" Nike had "Just Do It." Morton Salt had "When it rains it pours." And Clairol had "Does she, or doesn't she?" It has to be something catchy, and it has to be a name or slogan that describes the quality of the product.

Names are used to distinguish one product from another. In fact, some products have been so well-advertised that just the mere mention of the product causes us to think of one thing. For instance, when someone says "Xerox" we think of copying machines, even though there are other companies which sell copying machines. Or suppose the word is "Kleenex." We think of facial tissue, though there are many kinds of facial tissue. If I should say "Band Aid" we would think of adhesive bandages, and you and I both use the name "Band Aid" to refer to any adhesive bandage, regardless of the brand.

That's the way those names were designed, so that we would think of the product when we heard the name, and think of them more often, and hopefully buy them more often than we buy other brands. The names are important!

We all like to be called by our names, because our names are important to us. They set us apart from other people. My daughter was named "Jennifer" because the name means "white waves," which to me describes something very beautiful, and I hoped it would describe her character and spirit—which I believe it does. My son almost didn't make here. So he was named "Jonathan" which means "gift of God," because I was convinced that God protected him. He has indeed proven to be a gift of God.

I have a sneaking suspicion that my parents did not name me right away, at least not until they knew me a little better. My name “Stanley” means “field of devils.” What does your name mean? Chances are, had you been born a Hebrew ancient years ago, your name would reflect a special mission God had for your life, or else it would reflect the hopes and dreams your parents had for you.

Names are important in the Bible, and the name God chose for His Son was a name that reflected God’s nature and His character as it was revealed in a human form. The angel told Mary that the Son to be born to her was to be called “Jesus.” That name was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” which means “The Lord is salvation.” The name Jesus is important because it describes the Son of God. But that was a common name, and many parents had given it to their children as they waited for the coming of the Messiah.

So when Matthew told this story, he used a prophetic name, a Messianic name, to refer to the Son of God. He quoted the prophet Isaiah, and said the Child would be called “*Immanuel*.” That name is unique—it means “*God with us*.” That name is important because it tells us something about the nature and character of Jesus. That name tells us that God is with us through Jesus, and how exciting that is! Just think of what that means!

God had a mission for His Son to accomplish, and He did not send an angel of His cabinet or an ambassador or even the archangel Gabriel to rescue us from our sins. It was such an important mission, and God loved us so much, that He came Himself! He became one of *us* in order to suffer and die *instead* of us. Imagine! God with us! Born as a little baby in Bethlehem, walking and running and growing just like everyone else, sharing our joys and sorrows, knowing what it is to be fully and completely human, not just because He created us, but because He has experienced it personally.

But why? Why did God take such a risk? Why did He go to the trouble? To understand why, we need to understand what Jesus came to accomplish. Why is Jesus with us?

## **1 Jesus is with us to bring peace with God.**

As only He could! When the United Nations was chartered in 1945, one of its goals was to bring “peace on this planet.” But one only has to turn on the television to know that even the UN cannot accomplish that objective.

World War I was called “The War to End All Wars.” But it didn’t end all wars. And for us to think that we could bring permanent peace to this world of ours by killing and bombing and maiming is folly. All we really do is push back the enemy for a little while. It’s not real peace. In fact, the kind of peace our world needs cannot be obtained by nuclear arms limitation, or treaties between the superpowers, or negotiation, or force, or bombing, or battles or wars—because the kind of peace the world needs is a heavenly peace: the peace of God.

Even a casual study of the book of Judges in the Old Testament will reveal that God’s peace comes to a nation only when the individuals of that nation have the peace of God in their hearts. We discover today after searching and stumbling in the darkness of sin that we cannot have the peace *of* God until we have peace *with* God. Jesus is the Only One Who can bring us that kind of peace, because it comes to us through His blood shed on the cross.

Romans 5:1 declares that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and no other alternative is named. Paul tells us in Philippians that the peace of God is something the world cannot understand (4:7). Perhaps that is why the leaders of our world attempt to find it in every other way than through Christ!

The Bible says, “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). Jesus identified Himself with us in our sins that we might have rescue, and we are rescued from our sin because Jesus has brought to us peace with God.

## **2 Jesus is with us to bring reconciliation with God.**

Jesus is the Only One Who can bring mankind and God back together. When we say that we are separated from God, we’re not saying that God is like a little boy who has taken his baseball and gone home because we won’t play the game His way. Not at all! What we are saying is that when sin entered the human race, it separated us from God, because we in our natures became the exact opposite of God in His nature. That is the nature of sin: to pull us from the One Who created us.

But God is with us through His Son to bring us back to Himself. The only way to do that was to become one of us. The writer of Hebrews was referring to Jesus when he wrote: “*Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers [us] in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*” (Hebrews 2:17).

That might not mean much to you until you learn that the Latin word for “priest” means “bridge-builder.” Jesus as the High Priest builds a bridge between God and man, enabling us to be reconciled to God. Jesus is the Only One Who could build a bridge like that!

The beauties of nature might be wonderful and breathtaking, but through nature we only know God as a God above us. When we look at God only through the Law of Moses, we see God as a God against us. But when we turn to the Gospels, we see “Immanuel”—God with us, working to reconcile us to Himself, working for us down on our level, looking at us through Christ with human eyes.

A teacher of four-year-olds had gained a reputation of being able to communicate effectively with her students. Some other teachers, hoping to learn the secret of her success, visited her classroom one day. There they found her on her knees in the middle of the room, busily involved in an activity with her class. Later the visitors discussed her teaching methods with her, and expressed some concern about her lack of dignity in getting on the floor with the children.

“Well,” she replied, “I don’t know much about dignity, but I do know the only way to reach four-year-olds is to get down on your knees so you can talk to them face to face.”

That’s what Jesus had to do to reconcile us sinful human beings with holy God—get down on our level and talk to us face to face.

**3 Jesus is with us to bring us into a new relationship with God**  
Before Christ came into the world, mankind could have peace with God, and be reconciled to God through obedience to the Law of Moses. Should they ever slip up, they could have forgiveness for their sins by having a priest offer a sacrifice for them. But even after that was done, things were essentially the same. Nothing had changed on the inside of that person.

But Christ makes it possible for us to have, not just peace in our hearts, and not just reconciliation with God, but a new relationship with God! Before Christ, we had no hope of being anything more than dedicated servants of God. Now it is possible through faith for us to be declared sons of God, and for us to be able to call God our Father!

Listen to these words from Galatians 3:

*Before the coming of faith we were all imprisoned under the power of the Law, with our only hope of deliverance the faith that was to be shown to us...For now that you have faith in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God. All of you who were baptized 'into' Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ....It is because you really are his sons that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry 'Father, dear Father.' You...are not a servant any longer; through God you are a son. And, if you are a son, then you are certainly an heir.*

But how is that possible? Read John 1:12—“*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*” It’s made possible through our faith in Jesus as the Son of God and as our Savior.

A well-known preacher of another generation by the name of Alexander Campbell was hosting the famous atheist Robert Owen on his farm. As they walked across the pasture, Owen noticed a cow resting in the shade, calmly chewing her cud. “Mr. Campbell,” he said, “I am like that cow over there. Because I don’t believe in God or judgment, I have no more fear of death than she.”

“True, Mr. Owen,” replied the preacher, but then immediately added, “like that cow you have no fear of death, but also like that cow you have no hope of eternal life.”

I once had a dog named Missy, a cocker spaniel mix. When she was a puppy, one night I held her up above my head, looking right into her eyes. She was so secure in my hands that she promptly fell asleep, right there in the air. But as secure as she was, she could never know the security that comes with knowing you’re a child of God. She could never know the meaning of the name, Immanuel, God with us.

Which would you rather be: a dog who could never know the presence of God, or a human being who could know His presence but chooses not to? God is with us through His Son Jesus Christ to bring us peace with God, to bring us reconciliation with God, and best of all, to bring us into a new relationship with God.

That’s what Jesus came to accomplish. He has made it possible for us to have all that, and much, much more through His death on the cross. But now He lives forever, and He invites you to discover the real meaning of His birth by knowing from your own personal experience why He came to earth as He did.

No matter what *your* name is or what it means, that experience can be yours in a fresh way today. Won't you accept what Jesus came to offer to you? What a Christmas present that would be!