



Christmas approaches, and the emphasis as usual, for good or bad, is on giving and receiving gifts. If that be our focus, then let us consider the gifts we have received from above.

Part 2

It is, frankly, a pretty valuable thing to be granted salvation: eternal life with God—first in heaven, and later on His new earth. If you woke on Christmas morning to discover *that* treasure nestled in your stocking, or wrapped prettily under the tree, you would certainly conclude that any more gifts could only be superfluous. Any other gift you might receive after that would fade into pale insignificance by comparison.

Yet God, through Christ, has added a second gift under our tree—one unquestionably as unique, and almost as valuable as our

salvation. By His grace—make no mistake, it is *all* unmerited—God has granted to those who trust in His Son not just a post-death eternity with Him, but His presence for the remainder of our earth-life, as well.

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."

John 16:7



Reflections
by the Pond

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On an initial level the name Immanuel—God with us—certainly describes the historical event of holy God coming down to dwell with His creation during the span of Jesus' years on earth. It means God was "with" man, in flesh, appearing as a normal human male of the time.

But beyond that, the name Immanuel describes the more long-term dwelling of Jesus with every believer. Jesus manifests Himself in a number of different roles to the one who has believed on His name, but most ways have their foundation in the fact that He is *with* us. It is the unifying glue that holds together all the rest.

Jesus is a dependable friend—

because He is with us.

Jesus is a reliable comforter—

because He is with us.

Jesus graciously forgives and restores—

because He is with us.

Jesus gives unmeasured joy—

because He is with us.

Jesus consistently leads and teaches—

because He is always with us.



God designed Eden, "in the beginning," as He wished. It was a paradise not just for its inhabitants, but for God as well. It was the desire of His heart to commune intimately with His creation, to walk with them, to speak with them, to listen to their longings, their desires, in a most personal way. In their pristine state, man and woman dwelt

with their Maker. They could gaze upon His full glory and majesty. They could hear His audible voice. Though they knew Him as God and Lord, they also knew Him as friend and confidant. And they reveled in His boundless joy.

Sin broke that intimacy. Snapped it in two. From that point on, God would hear and respond to the entreaties of His people—but He would do so only from a distance. Man's sin had erected a barrier that man could not surmount. God would not walk with him in the cool of the morning dew. With only rare exceptions, He would not commune with him, intimately, face to face.

Just as God had separated Himself from Adam and Eve because of their rebellion, He separated Himself from all mankind because of the resulting sin nature.



And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Galatians 4:6-7 NKJV

As I tread the silent wooded path draped in snow, the full realization comes upon me like the enveloping warmth of the hearth in a winter storm. The warming Spirit washes over and through me, speaking the tender words of Jesus to my heart: "Do you see now? Do you understand? I am right here with you. My flesh touches yours. My Spirit is united with yours. I am right here. You need

only whisper and I will hear. And when you cannot speak at all, I will hear every unvoiced word of your heart. For I am right here. I will always be here."

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

John 14:18-21

The Holy Spirit, the gift we receive in Christ, is not just a prettily wrapped, all-inclusive package—an attractive ornament we set in a place of honor upon the mantle and, sighing contentedly, mutter "Wasn't that nice of God to give me this." The Spirit is not a pretty but useless gewgaw, but a golden key who unlocks all the wonder and wealth of heaven even in the here and now. He unlocks every door left bolted to those who reject Christ. He is our umbilical to heaven, feeding us with the nutritious word and mind of God. He is our translator, converting our groans into the language of heaven, then translating God's reply into a language we can understand. He is the comforting hand and impulse of the heavenly Father.

After God's gift of salvation, the Holy Spirit is our most precious and useful gift, for He is the one who connects us *right now* with the life we will be enjoying for eternity.

Long ago, before we were married, [Helen] was haunted all one morning as she went about her work with the obscure sense of God (so to speak) "at her elbow," demanding her attention. And of course, not being a perfected saint, she had the feeling that it would be a question, as it usually is, of some unrepented sin or tedious duty. At last she gave in—I know how one puts it off—and faced Him. But the message was, "I want to *give* you something," and instantly she entered into joy.

C. S. Lewis

