

A photograph of a winter forest. The trees are bare and covered in a thick layer of snow. A path winds through the trees, also covered in snow. The overall scene is quiet and serene.

Immanuel

*I tread a meandering
path through timber left mute
by its frosting of snow. All is hushed
and still. Not a sound breaks the spell.*

The fresh, uninterrupted covering is brand new. The soft blanket of whispering flakes has yet to be trampled by the beasts of forest and field. No rabbit has yet bounded down this path in return to its burrow. No bird has yet descended in search of seed or bug. No mouse has yet hopped and skittered across its surface. And no deer has yet traveled down this familiar lane, leaving its deep and pointed impressions.

Overhead and all around, the timber's skeletal remains have been frosted into splendor. Black, naked sentinels with their haphazard offspring populating the spaces between, have been transformed suddenly from bland ugliness into delicate beauty.

It is a wonderland. A serene, becalmed wonderland. Through the silence, however, a soft yet firm voice is heard.

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Here in this pristine solitude I want to be still, I want to “cease striving,” I want to stop pushing forward and let myself fall back into my Lord’s arms. In the holy silence of the wooded glen one discovers God—the same God the psalmist spoke of when he wrote,

**The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.**

Psalms 46:7



Since the first breath of Adam's life, God had been "with" man. Far from being a distant and disinterested deity, Jehovah God had always made Himself an active part of His creation. But since Adam's fall, God's presence had been less tangible. From man's perspective He was less visible, more ephemeral, like a soft breeze that passes by, then is gone.

But then there came a moment in time, precisely the correct moment in God's economy, when God made Himself *more* tangible—as tangibly real as a newborn infant bedded in a stinking feed trough.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Galatians 4:4-5

In recounting the announcement of the impending birth to Joseph, Matthew quotes the angel, who assigned the first of two different names to the Christ child—both of which expressed the two principal reasons for His coming. First, He would be the instrument of salvation from mankind's sin, the once and final sacrifice that need not be repeated.

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21

Second, quoting the prophet Isaiah, Matthew explained that this One whom Joseph would name "Jesus," would also be named "Immanuel," and that this name would represent Christ's second reason for coming.

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

Matthew 1:22-23

So the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus would represent, in two steps, a return to the sweet communion the Godhead first enjoyed with Adam and Eve in the garden. He would first have to do something about our sins. Since Adam's fall, our sin nature had separated us from God. Holy God can have no communion with sin; it is repugnant to Him.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, salvation—the once and for-

ever atonement for sin—would be accomplished. Then, as a result, Immanuel would, for those who believe on His name, usher in a renewed period of sweet communion with God. Made possible by Jesus' sacrifice, and implemented by the indwelling Holy Spirit, man would once again enjoy a personal intimacy with the Father.
God with us.



Here in the winter stillness of the wooded glen I listen for His voice. I cannot see my God, and I do not expect to hear His audible voice, but I know He is here. And when His Spirit quickens mine, joining in that sweet and mysterious union of holy God with redeemed flesh, He may as well be shouting. For in that moment His embrace is as real and tangible as the physical embrace of a human loved one.

Here in this garden of feathered ice I can experience some of what Adam once did in the original garden. Because my Savior came to earth to be born in flesh, because He offered that flesh on the altar of the cross, and because He rose from the grave to sit down at the right hand of the Father, I can enjoy some of the same sweet communion.

In fact, in Christ my relationship with God is far more intimate, far more exalted than that enjoyed by my long-ago predecessor. Because He is with me.

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

C. Austin Miles