

**INTRO**

The meandering path through the timber is 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 trammled 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.”**

Since the first breath of Adam's life, God has always been “with” man.

**Yahweh of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.  
(Psalm 46:7)**

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.

But then 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)**

## THE NAMES

In Matthew's account of Christ's birth we read of two important names given the Lord. These expressed the two principal reasons for His coming. The first was given by the angel, in his revelation to Joseph, and revealed that 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 One who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And 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)

**Jesus** = *Iesous* (ee-ay-SOOS) = **of Hebrew origin** [<H3091> (**Yehowshuwa** ↓)]; Jesus (i.e. Jehoshua), the name of our Lord and two (three) other Israelites :- Jesus.

**Yehowshuwa** (yeh-ho-SHOO-ah) = from <H3068> (**Yehovah** ↓) and <H3467> (**yasha**` ↓); **Jehovah-saved**; Jehoshuā (i.e. Joshua), the Jewish leader :- Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua. Compare <H1954> (Howshea`), <H3442> (Yeshuwa`).

**yhwh** (Ye-ho-VAH) = from <H1961> (hayah); **(the) self-Existent or Eternal**; Jehovah, Jewish national name of **God** :- Jehovah, **the Lord**. Compare <H3050> (Yahh), <H3069> (Yehovih).

**yasha** (yaw-SHAH) = a primitive root; properly **to be open, wide or free, i.e. (by implication) to be safe**; causative **to free or succor** :- × at all, avenging, defend, **deliver** (-er), help, **preserve**, rescue, be safe, bring (having) salvation, **save** (-iour), get victory.

Then Matthew offers commentary on this moment, revealing the second name.

**Now all this took place in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, “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)**

We are familiar with the specific prophecy in Isaiah quoted here—but perhaps not the context. Even the immediate surrounding text in Isaiah 7 is misleading; if that was all you had for context you might think that Ahaz, king of Judah, was a righteous king. He was *not*—not at all. For help in understanding the situation better, I’ll read Isaiah 7:10-17 from *The Message* paraphrase

**God spoke again to Ahaz. This time he said, “Ask for a sign from your God. Ask anything. Be extravagant. Ask for the moon!”**

**But Ahaz said, “I’d never do that. I’d never make demands like that on God!”**

**So Isaiah told him, “Then listen to this, government of David! It’s bad enough that you make people tired with your pious, timid hypocrisies, but now you’re making God tired. So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway. Watch for this: A girl who is presently a virgin will get pregnant. She’ll bear a son and name him Immanuel (God-With-U).**

**By the time the child is twelve years old, able to make moral decisions, the threat of war will be over. Relax, those two kings that have you so worried will be out of the picture. But also be warned: God will bring on you and your people and your government a judgment worse than anything since the time the kingdom split, when Ephraim left Judah. The king of Assyria is coming!”**

The hypocritical Ahaz ultimately rejected the sign of Immanuel, and placed his faith, instead, in... wait for it: *the king of Assyria!*—to his doom.

**Immanuel** = “God with us” or “with us is God”

### **CONSTANTLY ABIDING**

So if we think of the original context, it is clear that this name given to Jesus represents not just the *presence* of God, but God as our *champion*, or defender and protector. God is *with* us—He is on our side.

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 have their foundation in the fact that He is *with* us. It is the unifying glue that holds together all the rest.

Let’s read where Jesus gives us this promise.

**“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. On 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)**

And that was not all He promised during His final days on earth. Back up to v16.

**“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. You know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16–17)**

To live in this world it is often necessary for modern man and woman to develop a *carapace*—a hardened callus that helps them survive the rigors of a fallen world. But that same protective shell can insulate us not just to a toxic society, but to the ministrations of our heavenly Father, as well. And He is always seeking ways to cut through our shell.

The abiding Spirit enters us at the moment of conversion and immediately begins the softening process. He begins to work on whatever callus is there that might insulate us from communion with the Father. He systematically chips away at our anger, impatience, self-centeredness and greed, softening the heart as He steadily shapes and molds us into Christ’s image. But because we still live in the world, because we must survive in a land that hates what we now represent, we keep replacing the callus the Spirit has removed.

It's a risky business, letting one's callus soften. The world today is better suited to those wearing a tough suit of armor, and it can be a brutal environment for someone more tuned to the lilt of God's voice on a morning breeze. But when He speaks in the gentle snowfall that blankets the trees, when the crickets and cicadas sing His praise in the heavy summer dusk, He wants us to listen.

### **CONCLUSION**

The believer enjoys a sweet privilege of knowing God intimately. He is *with* us. This is the privilege forfeited by our parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden. They chose a passing earthly delight over the eternal delight of communion with the Lord.

As believers, every day we are given the opportunity to make a similar (if not so cosmic) choice. We can embrace the things of this world, building up our callus, and thus risking thicker insulation from God Himself. Or we can dare to let the Spirit remove the hardened callus, to soften our heart to the things of God.

When in the morning stillness He moves, and the world falls silent in anticipation before Him, God seeks those who have dared to remove their protective shell, those who have opened themselves completely to His tender touch.

And it all began, not in a garden called Eden, but in a village called Bethlehem.