

Isaiah 7:10-16
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon December 18th, 2022

God Is with Us

A similarity between Luke and Matthew's Christmas stories are that God is visibly present. In Luke's Christmas story, God speaks through angels. First, to Mary. Then to the Shepherds. In Matthew's Christmas story, God speaks through Joseph's dreams. In both these Christmas stories God's visible presence gives Joseph, Mary, the Shepherds peace from their anxieties, and guides them to the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah prophesizes that a Son will come who will be named Immanuel, which means God is with us. As Christians, we believe this Son is Jesus. And so, in both Christmas stories, God is visibly present through the baby Jesus (**Image One**: baby Jesus).

This week our focus is on the first half of Matthew's Christmas story. And what we see in this story is a person named Joseph who is hurting, because he finds out that Mary, the person he is supposed to spend the rest of his life with, is pregnant. Without any doing on his part.

Now, Joseph doesn't want any harm to come to Mary from the community, because he cares about her. But Joseph is ready to walk away from the relationship. He is ready to give up.

In response to Joseph's hurt, Joseph's reaction. God becomes visibly present in a dream to calm Joseph down from his anger, his pain, and help him understand all that has happened. So that Joseph will reconcile with Mary.

Through this visible act of God, Joseph is guided back to Mary. Joseph is guided to the cradle of Jesus where he will stand in God's visible presence (**Image One**).

Like Joseph and Mary, we find ourselves in confusing, painful, challenging, chaotic situations where we feel anxious (**Image Two**: a chaotic situation). Where we are ready to react. Instead, of taking a step back. Praying about it. Reading our Bibles. Worshipping. Trying to listen to where God is visibly present.

For Joseph, it is in his dream where he experiences the visible presence of God. Where he is encouraged to stop. Listen. Reflect. And get a clearer understanding of all that has happened.

Where is God visibly present (**Image One**: leave up for all the questions) for you when you find yourself faced with a chaotic, confusing, painful, challenging situation?

Where is God visibly present for you when your relationship with someone is struggling?

Where is God visibly present for you when you find out someone you love is terminally ill?

Where is God visibly present for you when you are mentally unwell?

Where is God visibly present for you when you are trying to support someone who is dealing with an addiction?

Where is God visibly present for you when you are dealing with a traumatic life event like an accident or a natural disaster or a death in the family?

Where is God visibly present in our lives?

Well, in all the pastoral care I have offered people in the 12 and half years of ministry, I have come up with a few possible answers to this question.

First, the Bible, the Word of God, is a calming visible presence of God for us. Many of us turn to the Psalms or the gospels to hear words of comfort and peace when we are dealing with these chaotic, confusing, painful, challenging situations (**Image Two**). Sometimes a story speaks to us in a way where we see God visibly present in our story. Stories where Jesus heals people. Stories where Jesus forgives people. Stories where Jesus gives people who have little to nothing, hope (**Image One**). Sometimes we connect personally to these stories, and feel Jesus' healing, redemption, forgiveness, and hope.

Second, Communion is a calming visible presence of God for many. Whether you are lying in a hospital bed waiting for major surgery or you just had imaging done and are waiting for the doctor to give you their prognosis. Whether you are feeling anxious as you transition to a nursing home or you are dealing with a tragic event. In taking communion, we physically experience God's calming presence through the body and blood of our saviour Jesus Christ.

Communion is also a gracious presence for many. Sometimes we feel shame or guilt and need to feel God's forgiving presence. When we come and eat and drink, we are physically experiencing the forgiveness Jesus offers us.

Third, through prayer we can experience God's visible presence. When we see a prayer being answered in our life, we bear witness to God visibly acting in our lives. Sometimes the answers are not so obvious. In this case, we may lean on someone like a friend, or a pastor, or a mentor to help us interpret where we see God's visible presence acting in our lives.

Fourth, through the body of Christ, through us the church, people can experience God's visible presence. Many people who have come to me have shared stories of feeling God's visible presence through the love and support of their siblings in Christ. Whether being visited by someone while in the hospital/nursing home or someone being there for them as they grieve. Whether it is someone helping them get access to their needs or creating a safe and hospitable environment for them when they are dealing with mental unwellness. Whether it is having someone pray for them or being affirmed when they have been excluded by others. There are many ways people feel God's visible presence through us, the church.

And so, as we face the chaos in our lives (**Image Two**). As we walk with others in the chaos of their lives, may we turn our attention to Matthew's Christmas story, and bear witness to God's visible presence. May we turn our attention to the entire Biblical narrative, and bear witness to God's visible presence. May we turn our attention to the communion table and bear witness to God's visible presence. May we turn our attention to prayer and bear witness to God's visible presence. May we turn to one another and bear witness to God's visible presence. May we turn to the cradle of Jesus, and bear witness to God's visible presence (**Image One**).

God's visible presence that is calming, forgiving, healing, and redeeming.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you reveal your visible presence to us in many different ways as we face chaos in our lives. Help us reveal your visible presence to others as they deal with the chaos in their lives. And guide us to the cradle where we bear witness to a saviour named Jesus. Jesus who Isaiah prophesied as Immanuel, God with us. **Amen.**

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