

Tonight is Christmas Eve! On this night we light the final candle of our Advent wreath—the Christ Candle. The Christ Candle reminds us that God is with us and that He has brought us salvation. The candle’s white color signifies celebration and purity.

Many people see God as distant, aloof, uninterested in our lives. Some believe that He is unapproachable, perhaps too busy to be bothered. Others of us are so afraid of Him that we dare not draw near. Perhaps we carry an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame because of our own failings. Whatever the reason, many people believe that God is in heaven and we are on earth, and never the twain shall meet.

Even those of us who would say that we have a close, personal relationship with God sometimes find ourselves estranged from Him. We sense that something has come between us and God. The reasons for this perceived separation can be many and varied. Yet, the result is still the same—God seems distant.

Enter Immanuel.

Centuries before Jesus was born, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

When Jesus’ mother Mary became pregnant with Him, an angel appeared to her husband Joseph to reassure him since Joseph knew he was not the father of Mary’s child. In his comments on the angel’s appearance to Joseph, the Gospel writer Matthew says,

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Matthew 1:22-23 (NIV)

Hebrew names have meanings, and the name “Immanuel” means “God with us.” So, Jesus, who is the fulfillment of this promise, is literally “God with us”!

God is with us in the person of Jesus. This God whom many view as distant and unapproachable actually came down from heaven to live among us. Jesus’ incarnation was not some cosmic anthropological expedition in which God came to earth to study humans. Instead, He came to live and suffer and die with us so that we could live with Him forever. No one forced Him to do this; He did it because He wanted to. He did it because He loves us. A God who loves us that much is anything but distant and aloof and unapproachable.

Christmas is about the God who bridged the gap between heaven and earth—Immanuel—the God who is with us.

## Reflection and Discussion

- Why might some people view God as distant and unapproachable? Have you ever thought of God in this way?
- What aspects of the Christmas story are most helpful to you in terms of seeing Jesus as One who loves you and whom you can approach?

## **Prayer**

Blessed Savior,

You are Immanuel! You are the God who is with us! Thank You for bridging the gap between heaven and earth. Thank You for living and suffering and dying among us. Thank You for showing us Your love in that incredible way. Please help us to grow in our appreciation for You and what You have done for us. Help us to know how near and approachable You are. Thank You for Your love and grace.

Amen.