



Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship

December 2023



Immanuel

Matthew 1:23 tells us, “A virgin shall be with child and will bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is interpreted, ‘God with us’.” This is the theme of Christmas – God with us all. How has that been interpreted for us where we presently live whether in Winnipeg’s North End, rural areas or even present day Bethlehem?

Luke’s telling of this reads, “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

The manger was God’s chosen way to be with all of us. It was very specifically chosen. It wasn’t exactly like a Holiday Inn or Comfort Inn. This family wasn’t included; rather they were excluded and sent to the stable. The Inn manager said, “No room”, but the stable accepted them. God is with us and with those in excluded places. It’s in those excluded places that He first entered the world. It was in a feeding trough within the dark dingy stables of the world. It was a place of stench and dung, with animals.

God with us, here of all places! God chose to be present with the fringes of society. He showed us that He is very present in our world and no matter how ugly or unpleasant it appears as it often does, He is present. Everything about the manger reminds us, as well as interprets for us His loving presence. He was in the mangers of the world for all of us.

God is with us!

By Pastor Lyle Blackbird



God, Are You There?

This past June I became homeless. I had to get my 12 year old daughter out of the place we were renting because it wasn’t safe. There were a lot of drugs and alcohol being used and my roommate wouldn’t listen when I asked her not to have people in the house that did these things.

We stayed at a friends for about 3 weeks but then she couldn’t keep us any longer, so we then stayed with another friend for a while although it wasn’t a great place to be. That friend ended up kicking us out in the middle of the night. We had nowhere to go so we tried going back to my old roommate for the night but she didn’t want us. We were on the streets that night. I felt so hopeless. I was thinking, why was God letting these things happen? Finally we went to my niece’s and she opened the door to us. I was so thankful. My niece has lots of her own kids though, and after two weeks I felt like we were a burden to her so we left once again. We wandered around that night in the pouring rain. My daughter asked why God was being so mean to us. We ended up going to another friend who said we could stay with her. We finally felt safe and began to look for our own place. It was very difficult and we had no success at first. It was very stressful. We were praying for a place but it seemed like all we got was shut doors. We’d been phoning an agency that helps kids with various needs but they never returned our calls. I phoned them one last time and told them that we would be homeless again in 2 days as my friend was leaving town. We prayed again. The agency finally answered my phone call and they had found a temporary place for us to stay with all our meals provided. It was such a relief to have somewhere to call home, even if it was just temporary.

Then very unexpectedly, my husband passed away. I blamed God for that and my life sort of fell apart. We were still safe in the temporary housing but I didn’t really care about much because I was so heartbroken. Then our housing place told us the agency

was not paying the rent anymore and we had to move. So we were going to be homeless again. A couple of months earlier we had applied for an apartment but were told there would be no vacancies for at least 6 months to a year. Out of the blue about 6 weeks later, the apartment people called and said they had an apartment for us! After a few glitches were ironed out, we moved into that apartment the day we had to be out of our temporary housing!

Looking back, I see that God was there looking out for us. He gave us places to stay, kept me and my daughter safe, and we had food to eat. Even though I felt like there was nothing to look forward to, God opened doors for me and my daughter. Although I lost my husband and am still missing him, I have started a new life with my daughter in our new apartment. He supplied a great place for us to live and I have started to make new friends. I’ve also found some groups that offer support. Going through this, there were times I didn’t believe God was there, but now when I look back, I can see **God was with us**. I think my faith has become a little bit stronger because of all this. But I wouldn’t want to go through it again!

Nancy



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God with Me

We asked some of our church people to share a circumstance or situation where they knew God was Immanuel to them; where they knew He was with them.

Elaine: I struggle with my vision. I only have a little of it left. My vision could have been gone years ago, but the Lord has left me a little bit. The Lord is my vision now. It’s the way I think and live. He’s here with me.

Marie: Sometimes I’m really close to God and other times He’s far away. When I’m close to Him, He speaks to me; I hear Him. When my husband was sick in the hospital, I was told he would have this condition the rest of his life. I asked God if this was too much for Him and he told me, “Marie, I can do much much more than you can imagine.” Eventually my husband was healed. God felt so present through this.

Pastor Lyle: I know God is with me getting me through leading funerals. He helps me to know what to say and how to meet people’s needs. I feel His presence and His heart in the midst of people’s pain. He’s with me to get me through these hard times.

Kurt: I was installing a furnace in a house and I needed warm weather to finish installing it as the owner wanted it done before it got cold. The very last day of warm weather I finished and things ran smoothly. The next day it was -20! I know God was with me and helped me. “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’” Heb. 13:5b-6

Rena: There was a time a while ago where God provided different things for me that I couldn’t afford. I needed some hygiene stuff and someone gave them to me. When I had a babysitting job, He provided rides for me. Five times while I was walking to work (a long ways away) people stopped and asked if I needed a ride. I had a cell phone that some people generously paid for. I knew He was there and that I could trust him. I don’t question God now.

Sylvia: Recently I had a diabetic seizure and that was really scary, but I could feel the Lord with me. I knew it wasn’t my time to go. He is always with me.



Thank you...

Financially, the Lord continues to meet our needs through some sister churches and individuals. We are very grateful for this much needed financial help. Being an inner city church with most of our people being from the community means there is not a lot of money. However, I am always impressed with the giving of those who don’t have much. One young man never fails to put offering in the basket, even if it’s just a quarter. His heart is in the right place. If you are in a position to help us out financially, we would be so grateful. If you are interested, you can give safely online at CanadaHelps on our website: www.bethlehem.ca. Or you can send a cheque to 467 Manitoba Ave, Winnipeg, MB, R2W 2G4. All donations are tax-receiptable. Thanks so much for your consideration of this.

