

Jesus is our Immanuel – The LORD is with us through changes and challenges.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about ⁴ : His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet ²⁰did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, ²²because he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” ²⁴ (which means “God with us”).²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife – Matthew 1:18-24

Joseph’s life had just been flipped upside down. His mind surely raced as Mary’s baby bump had also caused what must have felt like a huge lump in his throat. *She was found to be with child. How could this be?* Suddenly Joseph’s plans for a quaint family life, a respectable marriage, and a simple and honorable existence, all seemed to be crashing down around him. Yet as a testament to his character and his concern for Mary, Joseph was going to try to handle this sensitive situation as best as he could. However, God had different plans. After Joseph had considered ways to quietly break ties with Mary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and calmed his fears and set him on a new course.

The message from God’s messenger was delivered and Joseph received it with a heart of faith, and his mind and his life was changed by this remarkable news. Things would be difficult. Criticism and doubters and spiteful glances would be thrown their way, but Joseph believed in the promises of God. The Spirit of God worked in his heart and led him to the obedience of faith that silently stands so stoutly still today. When Joseph woke up, he simply obeyed God. He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. His plans were changed. His life was suddenly much different, perhaps much harder than what he was anticipating, but Joseph heard and believed the words of God and lived a life of quiet faith and obedience. God had spoken through the angel and Joseph trusted and believed that God would be with him and his family. Best of all, God had come down to be the Savior that Joseph and the whole world needed.

As we approach this Christmas season some things may seem like they have been flipped upside down. Changes and adjustments and fears have all rushed upon us for one reason or another, and it all might seem to be a bit too much to handle. But we are encouraged by this good news of great joy that was delivered to Joseph. With anxious thoughts running through his restless mind Joseph laid down for the night and the messenger of God came repeating the words of the prophet and announced this wonderful promise of God. ***“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” ^a (which means “God with us”).***

God is with us. No matter what is going on in your life, no matter what anxieties you are facing, no matter what changes or adjustments have upset your plans, remember this: God is with us. God loves you and he calls out to you in the dark night of sin and confusion with his Word and gives you peace through the gift of faith in Jesus so that you may face the challenges of each new year and each new day. This is the source of our hope and peace: a child is given for us and for our salvation. He comes to save us from our sins. They will call him Immanuel, which means God with us. His name is Jesus, he is our Savior.

Take to heart this wonderful message of Christmas and know that God cares about you so much that he came to dwell among us. He came to save us. He came to give us hope and the joy of an eternal future with him. Our plans and our lives may have been altered some or changed significantly this past year but remember the wonderful and lasting and eternal significance of the first Christmas and know that God is with us. The Lord Jesus came to save us from our sins, to know our struggles, and to give us the gift of eternal life.

May the Spirit of God place the faithful promises of God’s Word on your heart, and may he bless you, like he did for Joseph, with a life of faith and confidence in your Lord as you live for him who loves you so much that he came down to earth so that you would be with him forever. To us a child is born, and we gladly call him Immanuel for God is with us! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



From our family to yours have a Merry Christmas & Blessed New Year!

Henry (age 10)

Lego builder and Mario-Kart racer expert, Henry also has a high interest in all things Star Wars including watching *The Mandalorian*. Henry is an avid artist and is looking forward to participating in basketball and baseball as team sports resume in the new year.

Noah (age 7)

This high energy boy is known to the lunch ladies at St. John school as the bottomless pit. He has lost a few teeth this year and added a whole bunch of inches. He is passionate about reading, Star Wars, friends, and family. Just ask him and he will tell you... LOUDLY!

Penelope (age 3)

Penny Joy Kuschel, our self-proclaimed cutie, is a joy at home and apparently at school too. In her first year of full-time preschool, Penny won a "Lion Award" as her teachers publicly commended her for being a kind classmate and a joy to have in the classroom.



Ellie (age 12)

Our oldest, Ellie, is turning into quite the young lady. She loves school, learning about God's creation in science class, reading, drawing, reading, math, and reading some more. Ellie won the "Lion Award" in November for excellence in the classroom. She plays the saxophone, defender on St. John's soccer team, and piano.

Oliver (age 5)

Silly, curious, and precocious – Oliver is loving Kindergarten and doing well making friends. When he's not making himself the center of attention with silly sounds and antics, Oliver loves to slip away to look at books and play with Legos and nerf guns.

Beth (the super-sub)

This wonderful woman, who is such a blessing to our family, has been an incredible blessing to a number of local ministries in 2020. While maintaining a positive presence as youth counselor and developing a new curriculum at Prairie Lakes Youth Programs, Beth also found time to serve as a long-term sub as preschool teacher at Little Lambs in Danube (March-July) and as the 3rd grade teacher (August-November) at St. John School in Redwood Falls. WOW!

Mike (Tri-parish pastor)

In 2020, I was called to serve as pastor of a third congregation (St. John's of Renville) and appointed to serve another year as the local circuit pastor. This has resulted in the new title listed above. While this year also offered a few distinct challenges including livestreaming worship services in an empty church (March-June) and having Catechism classes over Zoom, it remains a great blessing to share the unchanging gospel to God's people throughout our area.

Baxter (age 91?)

Our yellow lab, Baxter, is still hanging on. While he has certainly slowed with age, he still enjoys searching for scraps that fall from our busy dinner table. He also seemed to appreciate the extra family time and attention during distance learning last spring.



(top left) Excited for school's "festive shirt" day Hiking in state park outside of Somerset, WI (top right) Baxter & Penny
(bottom left) Ellie & Penny {both in pink} presented with "Lion Award" (bottom right) Still loving Saints baseball in Sacred Heart