

Christmas at Hillsong Church



IMMANUEL God With Us

A Journey To Christmas:
Reflection

A Reflection

Immanuel – God With Us

Christmas tells the story of a God who does not stand at a distance. As Matthew writes: *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘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)**. From the very beginning, God’s desire has been to dwell with His people – to be close, not far; present, not absent. The name *Immanuel* holds this truth in a single word: God with us. Christmas is not only the story of a baby in a manger. It is a reminder of a God who has always been near, who stepped into our world, and who promises never to leave.

The story begins with a **Promise**. Centuries before that night in Bethlehem, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, declaring, *“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)**. Even in a time of fear and uncertainty, God promised His people that He would come to them. Every prophecy whispered hope into history, a reminder that God’s plan was never abandonment, but redemption. His promise was to be with us, to rescue us and to restore us.

That promise took on flesh in a **person**. In Jesus, the Word became human and made His dwelling among us. The God who created the heavens stepped into His own creation – into our noise, our need, our humanity. He didn’t send a message from afar; He came Himself. Through His compassion, His teaching, and His sacrifice, we see the heart of the Father revealed in a Son who chose proximity over power and relationship over religion. Christmas is the celebration of that divine nearness, of God with skin on, walking among His people.

When Jesus rose and returned to the Father, He assured His followers that His **Presence** would remain. *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* **(Matthew 28:20 NIV)**. Through the Holy Spirit, that promise continues today. God is with us in our joy and in our sorrow, in our questions and in our confidence. His presence is not limited to a temple, a Sunday service, or a season – it fills every moment with grace. He is Immanuel still: dwelling with, comforting, guiding, and transforming His people day by day.

And as His presence fills us, His **power** flows through us. Jesus said, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth”* **(Acts 1:8 NIV)**. The story of “God with us” becomes the story of “God through us”, a people who carry His love, His peace, and His light into the world. We are not only recipients of His nearness but participants in His mission. His power enables us to live as reflections of His presence wherever we go.

So this Christmas, **we remember the God who was with us in promise, who came to us in person, who abides with us in presence, and who empowers us through His power.**

He was with us in the beginning.

He is with us today.

He will be with us always.

This is the heart of Christmas – the eternal message of Immanuel: God with us.

A Christmas Journey: Promise / Person / Presence / Power

Week 1: God With Us in Promise

Focus

God with us in promise: His nearness begins with His word – spoken long before it was seen – reminding us that even in waiting, God is faithful.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time by inviting God to speak as you reflect on His promises.

You can pray this on your own or aloud with your group:

“Lord, thank You that You are a God who keeps His word. As we open Your Scriptures and reflect on the story of Immanuel, help us see how Your promises reveal Your heart to be with us. Strengthen our faith to trust that You are working, even when we are waiting. Amen.”

Introduction

Christmas tells the story of a God who does not stand at a distance. As Matthew writes, *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘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)**. From the very beginning, God’s heart has been to dwell with His people, to be close, not far; present, not absent. The name Immanuel captures this truth in one word: God with us. It is not just the story of a baby in a manger, but of a God who has always been near and will never leave.

Key Scriptures

Isaiah 7:14 (NIV) says, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

Genesis 3:15 (NIV) says, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Isaiah 9:6–7 (NIV) says, *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Reflection

The story of Immanuel begins with a promise. Centuries before the birth of Christ, God declared that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son called Immanuel — a name that would become a living sign of His desire to be with His people. Even from the first moments after the fall, when humanity turned from God, He spoke hope into the darkness: a promise of victory through the seed of the woman, one who would crush the enemy and restore what was lost.

Every promise of God throughout Scripture points to His heart for presence. He does not forget or forsake. His timing may stretch our patience, but it never fails His purpose. When we look at the birth of Jesus, we see a promise fulfilled in perfect faithfulness. The same God who came then is still keeping His word now — in our lives, in our families, and in our waiting.

Contemplative Questions

Use these prompts to guide your time of reflection. You can answer them quietly on your own or share your thoughts with your Connect Group.

Discovery:

- What do these Scriptures show us about God's character when He makes a promise?

- How do the promises of Isaiah and Genesis connect to the birth of Jesus?

Discussion:

- Where in your life do you feel like you're waiting for God to fulfil His word?

- How does remembering that 'God with us' begins as a promise, change how you view the waiting?

Devotion:

- What is one promise from Scripture you want to hold onto this Christmas?

- Write it down or share it aloud, thanking God for His faithfulness even before you see the outcome.

Closing Meditation

Take a few moments of silence to let these truths settle in. You can do this quietly or guide your group through a reflective pause.

Even in the waiting, God is with us. His promises are not distant hopes but living words that carry His presence into our present moment.

Sit with this truth for a minute, breathe deeply and whisper to yourself:

"You are with me, Lord, even here. Even now."

Week 2: God With Us in Person

Focus

God with us in person: Jesus, the Word made flesh, entered our world to reveal the heart of the Father and make His presence personal.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time by inviting God to speak as you reflect on Jesus: His life, His humility, and His nearness.

You can pray this on your own or aloud with your group: “Jesus, thank You that You came not only to save us, but to be with us. You entered our world, shared our humanity, and showed us the Father’s love in everything You said and did. Help us to know You not just as a story we celebrate, but as a living Saviour who walks with us daily. Amen.”

Introduction

Christmas tells the story of our God who does not stand at a distance. As Matthew writes: *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘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)**. From the very beginning, God’s heart has been to dwell with His people; to be close, not far; to be present, not absent. The name Immanuel captures this truth in one word: God with us.

In the second part of this story, the **promise** of God becomes a **person**. The eternal Word took on flesh and made His dwelling among us. God did not send an angel, a message, or a miracle alone – He came Himself. In Jesus, God’s presence took on human form so that we could see, hear, and touch His love. He is not an idea to believe in, but a **person** to know and walk with.

Key Scriptures

John 1:14 (NIV) says, *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Philippians 2:5–8 (NIV) says, *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”*

Hebrews 1:3 (NIV) says, *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*

Reflection

The mystery of the incarnation is the heart of Christmas: God with us in person. The infinite God chose to become finite, entering time and space to be with His creation. In Jesus, the invisible became visible. His birth in Bethlehem revealed the humility of heaven, that the Creator of all things would step into His own story to redeem it from within.

Every moment of Jesus’ life displayed the Father’s character: His compassion for the broken, His tenderness toward the outcast, His truth spoken in love. The Word made flesh is God’s way of saying, “I want to be known.” When we look at Jesus, we see the face of God and hear His invitation – to walk with Him daily, to know His heart, and to rest in His nearness.

Contemplative Questions

Use these prompts to guide your time of reflection.

You can answer them quietly on your own or share your thoughts with your Connect Group.

Discovery:

- What does it reveal about God's heart that He came to us as a person – fully human, yet fully divine?

- How does Jesus' humility reshape our understanding of greatness and power?

Discussion:

- In what ways have you experienced Jesus as personal, not distant or abstract?

- How can we reflect His closeness and compassion in our own relationships this season?

Devotion:

- Take time to read one story from the Gospels that shows Jesus' compassion (for example, John 4 or Mark 5).

- As you read, imagine yourself in the story. How might Jesus speak to you there – personally, kindly, directly?

Closing Meditation

End your time by creating space for stillness. Allow the truth of Jesus' nearness to rest in your heart. This can be done in silence, with soft worship music, or guided reflection.

God didn't shout His love from heaven – He showed it by coming close. The same Jesus who walked the earth, walks with you today.

Pause for a moment and whisper this truth to yourself:

"You are not far away, Lord. You are here with me."

Let His presence move from a truth that you know, to a reality that you feel.

Week 3: God With Us in Presence

Focus

God with us in presence: Jesus' promise was not only to come once, but to remain with us always through His Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to make you aware of His nearness.

You can pray this quietly on your own or aloud with your group:

"Holy Spirit, thank You that You are the presence of Jesus with us today. Help me to become more aware of You, in this moment, in my home, and in my heart. Teach me to walk with You daily, to listen for Your voice, and to rest in the peace You bring. Amen."

Introduction

Christmas tells the story of a God who does not stand at a distance. As Matthew writes, *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: '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)**. From the very beginning, God's heart has been to dwell with His people, to be close, not far; present, not absent. The name Immanuel captures this truth in one word: God with us.

The promise spoken through Isaiah became a person in Jesus Christ and through His life, death, and resurrection, that person became a living presence in every believer. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus assured His followers that His nearness would not end. *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* **(Matthew 28:20 NIV)**. That promise is fulfilled through the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us as Comforter, Counselor, and constant companion. God's presence is no longer confined to a place; it lives in His people.

Key Scriptures

Matthew 28:20 (NIV) says, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

John 14:16–17 (NIV) says, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."*

Romans 8:11 (NIV) says, *"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."*

Reflection

The message of Immanuel did not end in Bethlehem or at the cross. It continues through the presence of the Holy Spirit, God with us, now and always. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in every believer, bringing life, peace, and guidance to those who follow Him.

God's presence is not a feeling we chase, but a truth we carry. Whether in moments of joy or difficulty, His Spirit remains steady, faithful, and close. He reminds us that we are never alone. The nearness of God is not seasonal or situational — it is continual. When we slow down long enough to listen, we find that His presence has been there all along, whispering comfort, direction, and love.

Contemplative Questions

Use these prompts to guide your time of reflection.

You can answer them quietly on your own or share your thoughts with your Connect Group.

Discovery:

- What do these Scriptures reveal about how God's presence continues with us through the Holy Spirit?

- How does it change your understanding of 'Immanuel' to know that His Spirit lives within you?

Discussion:

- Can you recall a time when you felt aware of God's presence in a real or unexpected way?

- What helps you to stay aware of His nearness in everyday life — in prayer, worship, or stillness?

Devotion:

- Set aside a few quiet minutes each day this week to pause and invite the Holy Spirit to make you aware of His presence.

- Simply pray, "Holy Spirit, make me aware that You are here", and sit in silence for a moment.

Closing Meditation

End your time by creating space for stillness.

This can be done quietly, with music, or through guided silence. Let His presence settle over you.

He is Immanuel still – not once, but always. The same presence that hovered over creation, that filled the tabernacle, that rested on Jesus, now dwells in you.

Pause for a moment and whisper this truth to your soul:

"You are with me, Holy Spirit. You live in me. I am never alone."

Let His presence steady your heart and bring peace to your mind.

Week 4: God With Us in Power

Focus

God with us in power: The Holy Spirit empowers us to carry God's presence into the world so that others may know His love through us.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time by inviting the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh with His power and purpose.

You can pray this quietly or aloud with your group:

"Lord, thank You that You are not only with us but working through us. Fill us with Your Spirit again — with courage to love, power to serve, and grace to reflect Your heart in the world around us. Make our lives a testimony that You are Immanuel, still with Your people today. Amen."

Introduction

Christmas tells the story of a God who does not stand at a distance. As Matthew writes, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: '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). From the very beginning, God's heart has been to dwell with His people — to be close, not far; present, not absent. The name Immanuel captures this truth in one word: God with us.

The Promise of His coming was fulfilled in the Person of Jesus. His Presence continues through the Holy Spirit. And now, His Spirit empowers us with divine Power — not for personal gain, but for God's mission. Jesus did not only come to be with us; He came so that His life could be lived through us. As He told His followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV).

This same power, the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead, equips every believer to live out the message of Immanuel in real and tangible ways: loving others, serving with humility, and carrying hope wherever we go.

Key Scriptures

Acts 1:8 (NIV) says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

John 20:21–22 (NIV) says, *"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"*

2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV) says, *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

Reflection

The same Spirit who comforts us also commissions us. The presence of God was never meant to stop with us — it was meant to flow through us. When Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto His disciples, He was sending them out in the same love and authority that He carried from the Father. Immanuel becomes more than a name; it becomes a calling.

To live filled with His power is to live on purpose. It means allowing God's Spirit to move through our words, our actions, and our attitudes so that others encounter His nearness through us. Whether in a conversation, an act of generosity, or a moment of forgiveness, His power is made visible through everyday obedience. The world doesn't just need to hear that God is with us, it needs to see it in us.

Contemplative Questions

Use these prompts for reflection, either on your own or as a Connect Group discussion.

Discovery:

- What do these Scriptures teach us about how God's power is connected to His presence?

- How does it encourage you to know that the same Spirit who empowered Jesus now lives in you?

Discussion:

- Where in your life or community do you sense God calling you to be a witness of His presence and power?

- What holds you back from stepping out, and how can you rely on the Holy Spirit's strength rather than your own?

Devotion:

- Ask God to fill you afresh with His Spirit this week. Pray for boldness to love, courage to serve, and sensitivity to His leading.

- Consider one practical way to carry His presence into someone else's world this Christmas — a conversation, an act of kindness, or an invitation to church.

Closing Meditation

End your time in stillness, inviting the Holy Spirit to remind you of His power within you.

You may sit quietly, play soft worship music, or pray together as a group.

The story of "God with us" does not end in the manger, it continues through His people. His presence in us becomes His power through us.

Take a moment to breathe deeply and reflect:

"Lord, You are with me and within me. Empower me to carry Your presence into the world."

Rest in the confidence that wherever you go, Immanuel – God with us – goes with you.
