

ADVENT SERIES

Emmanuel

GOD WITH US

WHEN GRACE
APPEARS

TITUS 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared
that offers salvation to all people.

Titus 2:11

The face in the sky. The child born in the night among beasts. The sweet breath and steaming dung of beasts. And nothing is ever the same again. Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of humankind. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant's child...

...then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there too. And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place where we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from his power to break into and recreate the human heart, because it is just where he seems most helpless that he is most strong, and just where we least expect him that he comes most fully.

Frederick Beuchner, *The Hungering Dark*

“The LORD, the LORD, the
compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and
faithfulness...”

Exodus 34:6

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: 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. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

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 1:18-23

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:1

When it is a question of a sinner He does not merely stand still, open his arms and say, "Come hither"; no, He stands there and waits, as the father of the lost son waited, rather He does not stand and wait, He goes forth to seek, as the shepherd sought the lost sheep, as the woman sought the lost coin. He goes— yet no, He has gone, but infinitely farther than any shepherd or any woman, He went, in [truth], the infinitely long way from being God to becoming man, and that way He went in search of sinners.

Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*

Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less—no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.

Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:3-7

