

THE GIFT #4: IMMANUEL — THE PRESENT IS PRESENCE

John 1:1-14, 12/21/25, Dave Geldart

- Financial Update (DC)

- Xmas Eve Service (invite + fliers, This Wednesday, 5-545pm)

1. [1] Funny Intro:

- a. Did you all read in the news this week, on Wednesday?
 - i. Scholars discovered a previously unknown ancient Scroll that pertains to the Magi and the Gifts they brought Jesus
 - ii. [2] In fact it reveals there was a Fourth Wise Man Who Brought Baby Jesus a Priceless gift beyond compare
 - iii. Far more valuable than frankincense, myrrh, or even Gold.
 1. [3] A Priceless Lego Millennium Falcon
 2. The scholars concluded it would have cost more than 2 years wages for a typical Judean man.
 - iv. All 7,541 pieces of Lego Star Wars building glory
 1. For the Young Messiah King
 2. Who could probably put it together without any instructions
 - v. Incredible find.
 1. Incredible gift
 - b. I would love this gift, myself. It's now down to only \$850.
 - i. Get a head start on Pastor's appreciation month for next year
 - c. Truly, May the fourth (gift) be with you
2. All Joking aside, It is Advent, the season leading up to Christmas where we celebrate and prepare for the COMING of Jesus Christ
 - a. [4] And we've been looking at Gifts -- the 3 gifts brought by the Wise Men of frankincense, myrrh, and gold, and how they symbolize and foreshadow profound truths about the identity and mission of Jesus of Nazareth
 - i. Gold: He's not only the Messiah, **King of all Kings**
 - ii. Myrrh: He's also the **suffering servant**, who willingly gave his own life as a sacrifice to pay for our sins
 - iii. Frankincense: And he's our great **High Priest** who brings us directly into the PRESENCE of God the Father.
 - b. And while there's no fourth gift listed in the story given by the Magi
 - i. We are going to unwrap a priceless fourth gift that God Himself gives to us

3. (Introduction — The Deepest Longing of the Human Heart)

- a. **There is a longing that lives deep in the human soul**
 - i. a longing as old as Eden and as universal as breath.
 - ii. It doesn't matter your age or culture or background or personality
 - 1. every human heart carries this ache:
 - 2. **the longing to be with someone who truly knows you, sees you, loves you, and stays with you.**
- b. We feel it in moments of joy, when we whisper, "I wish someone was here to share this."
 - i. We feel it in moments of pain, when we ask, "Why does no one understand?"
 - ii. We feel it in moments of fear, when we silently hope, "I wish someone was close"
- c. This longing is not a glitch of the human soul — it is evidence of its design.
 - i. **You and I were made for presence**, for deep communion, for closeness with God Himself.
- d. **In Eden, we had this.**
 - i. The Bible tells us in the cool of the evening, Adam and Eve walked with God.
 - ii. They heard His voice not in Scripture but in conversation.
 - iii. They knew His nearness not through faith but through experience.
- e. But when sin entered the world, it did more than break rules — **it broke relationship.**
 - i. **Sin created distance.**
 - 1. Humanity hid. Humanity covered. Humanity feared. Humanity ran
 - 2. From God Himself
- f. And from that moment on, the story of the Bible — the story of Christmas — is the story of God doing whatever it takes to close the distance.
 - i. To bring us home.
 - ii. To restore presence.
 - iii. To give us the greatest gift -- that we've needed since the garden.
- g. Today's message is the fourth gift of Christmas — a gift greater than gold, frankincense, or myrrh.
 - i. **[5] The gift of Immanuel — God with us.**
 - ii. Or as I want to say it today:
 - 1. **[6] The present... is PRESENCE!**

4. (Scripture Reading — The Long-Awaited Promise of Immanuel)

- a. Long before shepherds heard angels sing, long before wise men followed a star, long before Mary held her newborn Son, God made a promise through His prophet Isaiah.
- b. [7] **Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)** - ¹⁴ **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**
- c. ~700 BC, Jewish King Ahaz feared invasion, instability, and collapse.
 - i. Into that fear came a promise:
 - 1. *A child will come,*
 - 2. *Not just any child*
 - a. *A miracle child -- born of a virgin,*
 - b. *and His very name will be Immanuel — God with us.*
- d. This name matters profoundly: Not “God above us.”
 - i. Not “God beyond us.”
 - ii. Not “God against us.”
 - iii. Not “God distant from us.”
 - iv. But **God WITH us.**

5. (Gospel Reading — Immanuel Fulfilled in Jesus)

- a. Seven centuries later, Matthew says that the birth of Jesus *fulfilled* that ancient promise.
- b. [8] Let’s read **Matthew 1:18–23 (NIV)** for the full story:

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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 [9] as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ 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.”

²² All 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” (which means “God with us”).
- c. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise — the embodiment of God’s very presence
 - i. the end of humanity’s distance, the breaking of the silence.

d. Christmas is not only a birth story — it is a presence story.

6. (John's Christmas — The Word Who Became Flesh)

a. John tells the story of Christmas from a different angle.

i. He does not tell of shepherds or a manger or angels or magi — he tells us what all those things *mean*.

b. [10] John 1:1–5, 9–14 (The Message):

¹⁻² The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. ³⁻⁵ Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out. ...

⁹⁻¹³ The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world, the world was there through him,

[11] and yet the world didn't even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten.

¹⁴ **The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.** We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

c. Here is the heart of Christmas → GOD CAME CLOSE!

i. **The eternal God put on flesh and bone.**

ii. **The God of creation became the God of incarnation.**

iii. **The God above us became the God among us.**

d. Or again — **the present is PRESENCE.**

7. [12] Story: The Power of Presence

a. When I was a young kid, I remember the first time I got separated from my parents in a store. One moment they were right next to me, the next moment I turned around and they were gone.

i. The store suddenly felt enormous.

ii. The air felt heavy.

iii. Fear rushed in.

- iv. Tears started to come.
- v. I walked faster, then ran, then called out.
- vi. Nothing.
- vii. The distance felt unbearable.
- b. But then —
 - i. I heard my mom's voice.
 - ii. I saw her turn the corner.
 - iii. And instantly everything changed.
 - iv. The situation didn't change.
 - v. The store didn't change.
 - vi. The danger didn't change.
- c. **But the presence changed everything.**
 - i. Because when someone who loves you is with you, fear shrinks and peace rises.
- d. That's Christmas.
 - i. Not that God removed every danger.
 - ii. Not that He erased every difficulty.
 - iii. But that He entered our world and said:
 - 1. I'm here.
 - 2. I'm with you.
 - 3. I will not leave you.

8. [13] The Bible's Great Theme: God Wants to Be With His People

- a. From Genesis to Revelation, the great theme of Scripture is presence — God with His people.
 - i. **In the Garden:** God walked with Adam and Eve.
 - ii. **In the Wilderness:** God dwelled among his people in the tabernacle.
 - iii. **In the Temple:** The Glory of God's presence filled the Holy of Holies.
 - iv. **In the Exile:** God promised to gather His people again.
 - v. **In the Prophets:** God promised a Savior named Immanuel.
 - vi. **In the Gospels:** God became flesh and "moved into the neighborhood"
 - vii. **In Acts:** God sent His Spirit to dwell *inside* His people.
 - viii. **In Revelation:** God promises to dwell with us physically forever.
- b. Everything in the Bible is moving toward restored presence.

9. God With Us — In Our Humanity, Not Just Our Holiness

- a. Jesus entered not only our world but our humanity — our tears, our temptations, our tiredness, our limitations.
- b. This is different from our Frankincense sermon emphasis.
 - i. Today the focus is not Jesus as High Priest, making atonement, but Jesus as **Immanuel**, WITH US PERSONALLY, sharing our humanity.
 - 1. He knows hunger — He went forty days without food.
 - 2. He knows thirst — “I thirst,” He said on the cross.
 - 3. He knows weariness — He fell asleep in a storm.
 - 4. He knows heartbreak — He wept at Lazarus’s tomb.
 - 5. He knows rejection — “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”
- c. God does not merely tolerate being w/ us—**He desires it**, embraces it, enters into it.
 - i. Even when it cost him everything

10. God With Us Now — Through the Holy Spirit

- a. After Jesus was resurrected and ascended back to Heaven, He didn’t leave us alone— He left us with His presence.
- b. **[14] John 14:16–18 (NIV): (Jesus speaking to his Disciples)**

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
- c. Jesus is not only God *with* us; through His Holy Spirit He is God *in* us.
- d. This means God’s presence is not seasonal, not occasional, not emotional — it is **constant**.
 - i. SO even when you feel God is absent, He is not.
 - ii. Even when you feel God is silent, He is near.
 - iii. When you feel God is distant, He is close.
- e. Your feelings do not determine His presence — His promise does.

11. The Second Advent — Immanuel Forever

- a. Advent is not only about a baby in a manger — it points to the future, to the day Jesus returns to live with us forever, and Immanuel is finally and fully realized!
- b. **[15] Let’s read Revelation 21:1–5 (NIV): (John in a vision toward the end of his life)**

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! **God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.** They will be his people, and **God himself will be with them** and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from

[16] their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

c. This is the destination of the Christian story.

- i. Not clouds. Not harps.
- ii. Not a vague spiritual existence totally unlike our current physical life
- iii. But Immanuel forever — God dwelling physically with redeemed humanity on a restored earth.

1. Jesus will come back – and be RIGHT HERE with us – FOREVER!

d. This is the moment when the longing of Eden is finally fully healed.

- i. This is the moment when the presence of God is no longer tasted in part but experienced in fullness.
- ii. This is the moment every shadow points to, every promise leans toward, every Advent prepares us for.
 - 1. The Bible tells us this will be a great party – with Jesus literally pouring the drinks! → can you imagine it!!!?

e. In other words:

- i. **Christmas looks backward to Bethlehem but it also looks forward to the New Jerusalem.**
- ii. The first Advent assures us the second Advent is coming.
 - 1. **JOY TO THE WORLD – song is actually about the 2nd ADVENT!!!!!!**
 - 2. You always see one through the other
 - a. He’s come – and He’s STILL COMING
- iii. This is where history is headed.
 - 1. This is where Advent leads us.

12.[17] The Present Is PRESENCE

- a. This is our theme today, and I want to pause on it:
 - i. **The greatest present is PRESENCE!**

- b. You can receive a thousand material gifts this Christmas, but none of them can fill the ache in your soul.
 - i. Not the newest tech.
 - ii. Not the nicest clothes.
 - iii. Not the grandest vacation
 - iv. Not the biggest toy.
 - 1. Even the Lego Millenium Falcon with 7,541 pieces!
 - v. Not even the best of times with family
 - vi. Or the richest traditions, as wonderful as they are.
- c. The gift your heart needs is not a thing.
 - i. It's not an experience.
 - ii. It's not a circumstance.
- d. **The gift your heart truly longs for...**
 - i. **is presence with God Himself.**
- e. Christmas is the story of a God who gives us Himself
- f. Don't miss this Ultimately CHRISTMAS Truth:
 - i. God so loved the world that He GAVE us the gift of presence.
 - 1. **He came Himself.**
 - 2. John 1:14 (MSG): **[The Almighty Creator God of the Universe] became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.**
 - ii. Because the present...
 - 1. is PRESENCE.

13.[18] Immanuel, God With Us in Our Real Lives: Practical Advent Applications

- a. As we move into this Christmas week, the nearness of God becomes more than theology — it becomes a lifeline.
- b. **Here are specific, real-world ways Immanuel matters:**
 - i. **God is with you in the emotional complexity of Christmas.**
 - 1. For many, Christmas is a mixture of joy and ache, celebration and grief, hopes and disappointments.
 - 2. Immanuel means you don't walk through that alone.
 - a. Don't process it alone
 - ii. **God is with you in relational tensions.**
 - 1. Family gatherings can stir old wounds. Create new ones!
 - a. Unhealthy dynamics and styles of relating

2. Immanuel means He stands with you in the room, giving you His patience and His peace.
 - a. Even in the midst of family dysfunction and tensions
- iii. God is with you in your weariness.**
 1. The holidays can be exhausting.
 - a. All the shopping, prepping, travel, interactions, anxieties...
 2. Immanuel means rest is not just available — rest is *with you*.
- iv. God is with you in your loneliness.**
 1. Some are acutely alone during the holidays.
 2. And even in a house full of people you can feel alone.
 3. Immanuel means you are never truly alone.
 - a. GOD IS WITH YOU, not in some spiritual metaphorical sense
 - b. BUT IN ACTUAL REALITY, through his Spirit
- v. God is with you when you face financial stress.**
 1. Some families feel pressure and scarcity this time of year.
 2. Immanuel means your Shepherd walks with you.
 - a. And He is our provider
- vi. God is with you in your longing for renewal.**
 1. As the year ends, many reflect on failures or regrets
 2. As you long for things to be put right and made new.
 3. Immanuel means your future is secure and your hope is alive.
- c. These aren't clichés — they are promises.**
 - i. Immanuel means God does not meet you at the finish line; He walks beside you every step.
 1. Sometimes carrying us when we can't go on
- d. This is why practicing God's presence matters — because His presence transforms your present

14.[19] Practicing Presence with Immanuel — Simple and Actionable Steps

- a. Here are 5 ways to “be with God” in the final days before Christmas
 - i. Create small pockets of quiet.**
 1. Two minutes in the morning.
 2. One quiet walk.
 3. A soft prayer before bed.
 4. A few minutes spent with a journal.

5. When we slow down enough to let the stirred up waters of our soul settle and grow clear.
6. Presence grows in stillness.

ii. Invite God into the ordinary moments.

1. Cooking.
2. Driving.
3. Wrapping gifts.
4. Talking with Uncle Larry at Christmas.
5. Talk to him in your heart like he's always in the room with you
6. Saying, "God, thank You for being with me right now," changes the atmosphere.

iii. Bring your emotions honestly.

1. Practice being fully present with your physical and emotional experiences
2. Don't hide them.
3. Presence thrives in honesty.
4. God can handle your emotions.
 - a. They're a feature of his Good Design of you.
 - b. Just read through the Psalms!

iv. Read Scripture slowly.

1. Not rushing.
2. Not checking boxes.
3. Listening.
4. Receiving.
5. The goal is relational contact with God Himself, rather than intellectual study or memorization
6. If you're looking for somewhere to start: John 1

v. Pay attention to people.

1. Presence with people teaches presence with God.
2. Slow down and choose connection.
3. Put down your phone
 - a. The biggest hinderance to presence (with people and GOD)
4. Look into someone's eyes.
5. Listen fully.

6. Give the gift of presence.

- a. In Honor of the God who has given US the gift of HIS presence

b. Because remember — the present is PRESENCE.

15.[20] The Story Ends Where It Began

- a. The Bible begins with God walking with His people in a garden.
 - i. It ends with God dwelling with His people on a renewed earth.
- b. The story begins with presence.
 - i. It ends with presence.
 - ii. Christmas is the hinge in the middle — the moment presence returns.
- c. And the message of Christmas is the message of eternity:
 - i. God wants to be with you.
 - ii. God has come to be with you
 - iii. He's with you now in fact through his Spirit
 - iv. God will one day dwell with you forever in the flesh!
- d. This is the hope that carries us into Christmas week, and into the New Year, and into eternity.
 - i. Immanuel -- **"The JOY OF EVERY LONGING HEART"**

16.Final Invitation: Give and Receive the Gift of Presence

- a. This is more personal than anything else in Scripture.
 - i. God is not offering you a philosophy.
 - ii. He is offering you Himself.
- b. And so the invitation of the fourth Sunday of Advent is simple and profound:
 - i. **Receive the gift.**
 - ii. **Open the present.**
 - iii. **Welcome the presence.**
 - 1. Offered you exclusively through Jesus Christ
- c. God is with you.
 - i. **Will you be with God as he wants to be with you?**
- d. He won't force his way in.
 - i. He knocks, will you open up the door and invite him in?
- e. **Let us pray:**
 - i. Jesus, Immanuel, thank You for coming close.
 - ii. Teach us to slow down, to open our hearts, to welcome Your presence.
 - iii. Let Your nearness transform our Christmas and our lives.
 - iv. And give us opportunities to give the gift of presence to others in gratitude and honor of Immanuel. Amen.

The Gift

Gold ⁷⁹ Au
Precious Metal
Symbol of Kingship
on earth
196.967



Frankincense
Resin from tree
Highly fragrant
Symbol of healing



Myrrh
Resin from tree
Spice for embalming
Symbol of suffering

Newly Discovered Scroll Reveals Fourth Wise Man Who Brought Baby Jesus A Priceless

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Immanuel: God With Us

The Gift



The Present is Presence!

Immanuel: God With Us

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: **The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**



Matthew 1:18-23

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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



Matthew 1:18-23

as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ 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.”

²² All 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”** (which means “God with us”).



John 1:1-5,9-14 (The Message)

¹⁻² The Word was first, **the Word present to God, God present to the Word**. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. ³⁻⁵ Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out. ... ⁹⁻¹³ The Life-Light was the real thing: Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world, the world was there through him,



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and yet the world didn't even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten. ¹⁴ **The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.** We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.



The Gift

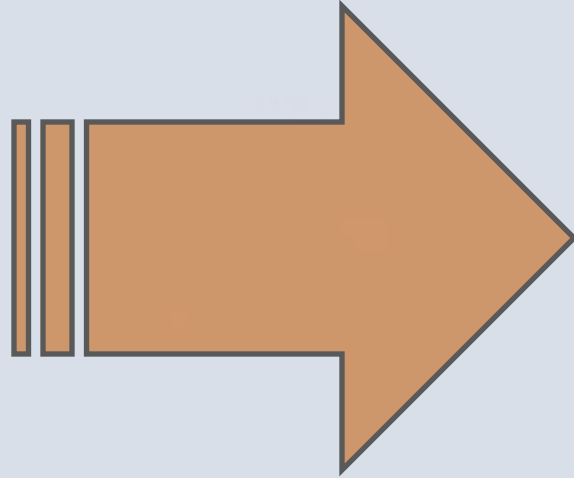


The Present is Presence!

Immanuel: God With Us

God Wants to Be With His People

- In the Garden
- In the Wilderness
- In the Temple
- In the Exile
- In the Prophets
- In the Gospels
- In Acts
- In Revelation



PRESENCE



John 14:16-18

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and **be with you forever**—¹⁷ **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. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you.**



Revelation 21:1-5

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “**Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people**, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and **God himself will be with them** and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from



John 14:16-18

their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

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The Gift



The Present is Presence!

Immanuel: God With Us

Immanuel in Our Real Lives

- God is with you in the emotional complexity of Christmas.
- God is with you in relational tensions.
- God is with you in your weariness.
- God is with you in your loneliness.
- God is with you when you face financial or practical stress.
- God is with you in your longing for renewal.



Practicing Presence with Immanuel

- Create small pockets of quiet.
- Invite God into the ordinary moments.
- Bring your emotions honestly.
- Read Scripture slowly.
- Pay attention to people: give the gift of presence



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