

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE | WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!: Returning Presence | Week 2 | December 9, 2018

Luke 1:5-25, Luke 1:26-37, John 16:13-14

Opening: “Christmas Presence”, Immanuel—God with us, is as present and perhaps as important as the air we breathe. The promise of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13-14) assures us of that presence. Join us as we explore the mystery of entering that presence, the presence of Immanuel.

Context: Last week we looked at the self-imposed cultural pressure that can engulf us around the holiday of Christmas. This week, as a slight aside, let us imagine the events from the eyes of Israel. We ask this question: “What Just Happened?”

Historical Setting: We look backwards to the Old Testament and the last book written was the minor prophet Malachi which is dated by scholars around 450 BC. In Malachi the description of Israel is not complimentary but it states:

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. **Malachi 3:1 (ESV)**

Imagine 450 years of silence from the PRESENCE. More than 20 generations of Pharisees’ rulemaking and judgement. What would your mindset be? What would you be feeling about the commandments and rules? Fast forward: Are you feeling “rules” today? What are they?

“My Messenger”: The messenger is referred to in Malachi and in Isaiah (40:3) and was probably a sign that was watched for in Israel. The priests would bring it up as they spoke in the Tabernacle. *What would we have seen and believed of these two births had we been living then? How do you find that God is PRESENT in your life today?*

Parallel Accounts: Read and compare the two birth foretelling accounts as follows:

<i>(all vs. from Luke 1)</i>	<i>Elizabeth/John</i>	<i>Mary/Jesus</i>
• Introductions of characters:	vs.5-7	26-27
• Announcement of birth	vs.11-17	28-33
• Response to Angel	vs.18	34

What contrasts do you see? What similarities? What can you imagine about the people of Israel from the responses?

A Metaphor for the Coming Redemption: God re-engages the conversation with Israel after 450 years with two miraculous births, to very different parents and in very unassuming ways. *If God wants to re-establish His PRESENCE how else could he do it? How has He done it before?*



Mary's Response to God: Read vs 46-55. Imagine, Mary is carrying the Christ Child in her womb as she worships. *What contrasts do you see? What do you think Mary's worship says about the unassuming way God is coming back to Israel? To whom is the PRESENCE coming?*

Enter Love and Grace: We now know the worldwide impact that was started as a result of what began as two miraculous births: the messenger and the Messiah. We have a New Covenant and the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide us in the Love of the Father and the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Compare this PRESENCE with living under the Pharisees' rules and judgements. What PRESENCE do you feel now? How does it affect the way you live? Has PRESENCE changed you?

A Gift to Give: In this season of gifts, recognize the greatest gift you have and be aware you also have that gift to give. *How can you start the process of giving God's Story to someone who doesn't know it? Dan spoke last week about yearning. Do you yearn for someone to know God? Who do you think of? How will you shine God's PRESENCE into that person's pain or hurt? How would you talk to them? What would you invite them to? Imagine the conversation and pray.*

Practice of the Week: Looking for the Presence (again)

I don't think "the constant jingle-jangle of this season" has stopped. Find some places of silence in the next week to reflect on your life and look for the good that God is growing. Imagine sharing that. What keeps you from doing it?

Family Formation: Who are those guys?

Revisit prayers..... Read the story of Mary and Elizabeth as Mothers and imagine the boys together as cousins. Describe the impact on the world that we see as "church" today. Google "Christianity" for numbers and nations. Then talk about that coming from what once looked like two Mom's and two little boys in your school. That's how powerful God's love is!!

Additional Resources: 25 Quotes about Christmas

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/25-quotes-about-christ-for-your-christmas.html>

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts questions, comments, ideas on how to make these study guides more meaningful for you and your group, please let us know.

We also enjoy hearing how God is using these scriptures and study guides in your lives.

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