

Christmas Eve C 2018
December 24, 2018 :: Luke 2: 1-20
Fr. Jim Cook

“God With Us.”

It's been a busy couple of weeks at the Cook's house: putting up the Christmas decorations, cleaning the house in general, preparing the guest bedrooms in particular.

It's been a lot of work, and we've worried over getting everything just right for the kids. *And especially because it's our first Christmas with our first grandson!* (Actually, truth be told, Peggy has been doing most of the work. And, therefore, most of the worrying.)

Last Friday, we went to the Winter Solstice Party at the Hazel Modella Gallery, downtown. It was a great time! But, there, Peggy ran into our good friend, Nadia, who offered her words of assurance:

Your kids don't really care about the things you're worrying over. All they really care about is being together as a family. That's what Christmas is for them.

Christmas is about being together; about being with the ones you love.

Now, we've just heard The Gospel of Luke's version of the birth of Jesus. It's a truly lovely story. But The Gospel of Matthew's version of the birth story contains an element I miss in Luke's version. There, when Mary becomes pregnant, an angel appears to Joseph, to assure him that all is as it should be. And the angel quotes from the prophet Isaiah: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God with us."

This, then, becomes one of the first messages of Christmas: As much as we want to be together with our families at Christmas, God wants to be with us all of the time. And, indeed, God is with us. God always has been with us. And God will always be with us. But frequently we fail to see it.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible about someone failing to see what God has been doing, comes from 2nd Kings 6. The King of Aram has been trying to wage war against the King of Israel. But no matter where the King of Aram sends his soldiers, the prophet Elisha tells the King of Israel what's happening, and so he

King of Israel moves his soldiers around accordingly. And this so frustrates the King of Aram, that he decides to send his soldiers to attack the city where Elisha lives, and kill that meddlesome prophet once and for all.

One morning, Elisha's servant sees that their city is completely surrounded by the army of Aram, and he cries out in fear. But Elisha assures him: "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." And suddenly, Elisha's servant sees, all around them, and as far as the eye can see a countless host of angels, standing guard.

Long story short, the story ends well for Elisha and his servant. But that's the image that comes to my mind when I hear that name, Emmanuel — "God with us" — that countless host of angels.

You see, when the Bible declares that God is "with us," it's saying something more than simply that God is at our side, or in our presence in some limited or finite fashion. No, it's the declaration that God is "with us" in the same way that the countless host of angels was surrounding Elisha and his servant. In other words, wherever we are, God is there also.

In the end, Christmas is simply a reminder that God wants to be with us. Because God loves us. And because God enjoys nothing more than hanging with his family and friends.

And so, in this Christmas season, may God grant us eyes that can see him at work in the world all around us; and may God grant us arms that can embrace him in every person we encounter; and may God grant us hearts that can warm at the assurance that the child born this day bears the name of Emmanuel, “God with us.”

God love you. God bless you. And merry Christmas.