



## UNTO US

God With Us  
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## Discussion Notes

The Crossing Church  
Las Vegas, Nevada

### OPENING

Today we are launching a new Christmas series at The Crossing called “Unto Us.” Christmas is all about God’s presence. Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote to the nation of Israel about the good news that God is coming to earth to save them. “For unto 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.” (Isaiah 9:6) This series tells the story of God’s efforts through the ages to come close to His people and to live among them.

### SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

**Exodus 13:21** “By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.”

**Exodus 24:18** “Then Moses entered the cloud as he went up on the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”

**Exodus 25:8** “Then have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them.”

**Exodus 40:36-38** “In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out - until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all of their travels.”

**1 Kings 8:27** “King Solomon said, ‘But will the Lord really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built?’ ”

**Matthew 1:18-25** “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and 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 be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means God with us.’ (Isaiah 7:14) When Joseph woke up he did what the angel had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

### OBSERVATION

To understand the significance of Christmas we have to understand God’s relationship with His people before Christ was born. In the Old Testament, nothing was more crucial to the people than the presence of God. They sought Him and God lived among them in a cloud, in the Sinai desert, in His tabernacle, in the temple, and then in a manger.

**Question:** When was the last time you noticed God’s presence and you followed Him?

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture listed is NIV unless otherwise indicated



## APPLICATION

Christmas is experiencing the presence of God. God has always had the desire to be with His people. In the Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam and Eve and communed with them until they sinned and were separated from Him. Since then, God has been on a relentless pursuit to get close to His people again.

**Question:** Under what circumstances do you truly feel the presence of God?

**Question:** Why do you think God relentlessly pursues us?

**Question:** Tell us about a time when you were gathered with your family and weren't fully present. What was distracting you? How can you make sure this doesn't happen again?

When God chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, He was among them on their journey in a cloud by day and a cloud of fire by night. The cloud became synonymous with the presence of God and the people were reassured of God's presence from the time they awoke to when they went to bed. They followed the cloud to Mount Sinai where Moses ascended to meet with God. He spent over a month there and when he returned to the people, his face was so radiant that the people knew he had been in the presence of God.

**Question:** Tell us about a time when you felt the glow of the Spirit of God upon you?

Then God gave instructions to build a tabernacle, a place where He could dwell among them. This tent was God's dwelling place until King David was told to prepare all of the materials needed to build a temple in Jerusalem. His son Solomon was honored to build it, but he couldn't believe that his most glorious temple could contain God and he was right. The people knew that God would be there, but they thought He was only there and they didn't realize that God's presence was everywhere. So, when the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A. D., they felt separated and isolated from God.

**Question:** Tell us about a time when you felt isolated from God? How did you feel and what did you do?

Then came the manger in Bethlehem. It is the culmination of God's pursuit of us: from the cloud to the tent to the desert to the temple and now to a person, Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us.

Immanuel is an invitation to join with God in His plan for our lives. This means He is available all of the time. The God of creation is accessible to us every moment throughout our days. But Christmas is not just a reminder that God is dwelling among us - it is an invitation from Jesus Christ to follow Him, just as He called the disciples. He wants to spend time and be close with us. Our mistake is in thinking we need to focus on the "me" part of His redemptive plan and we forget about God's part. We need to realize that our lives change when we get close enough to Jesus because when we start loving Him, we start living differently.

**Question:** When you realize that you are focusing on your part of God's plan for your life, what changes?

**Question:** If you haven't done so, when will you make the decision to follow Jesus?

The season of Advent starts four Sundays before Christmas and it is a time of preparation - not just preparation for decorating and food planning - but for preparing our hearts for Jesus. It is a time of moving toward Him, recognizing His presence, and joining Him in what He is doing.

**Question:** What are you doing to prepare for Christmas this year?

Do you realize that, when Christ rose to Heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father, He left His Holy Spirit with us, not to indwell a tabernacle or a temple, but to indwell our hearts? He lives in us! Praise God!

**Question:** If you truly believed that God has been on a relentless pursuit of you, what would you do with your life?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for pursuing your people through the ages and now pursuing us through Your Son, Jesus. You are the Mighty God, Creator of the Universe, the Holy and Righteous One, the Everlasting Father and yet You yearn for a relationship with us. We are humbled by Your love and faithfulness. Help us to prepare for this Christmas season through prayer, studying Your Word, and bending our knees and hearts before You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.