



Matthew 1:18-25

In the beginning, God lived with humanity in a perfect Garden, and in the end, God will live with humanity in a holy city that descends to earth and is lit by his glory and presence. The whole story of Scripture is a story of coming back home and returning to the presence of God. This is what it means to come home. It is not just about an eternal afterlife, but anywhere we are in the presence of God.

In Advent, we prepare ourselves for the history shaping and life changing in hope of Jesus, God himself, coming to live with and among us. In the Old Testament God was nearby in a bush, or a tent, or a pillar, or a box, or the temple, but on Christmas, God is not merely nearby, Jesus becomes a human with humans. Matthew makes certain that we do not see Jesus merely as a good guy or a good teacher, but God himself. Born of the Holy Spirit to a woman betrothed, He fulfills a promise within a promise from the book of Daniel. "The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." Originally this is a promise that a particular virgin would stop being a virgin and conceive a son, and that son would show that God is on his people's side. But it becomes a promise that God is not merely on the side of his people, but that he will be with them fully. Truly with them. To fulfill this promise, God chooses to become a human to be at home with and among his people.

This is the hope and goal of the entirety of the Christian life: being with God. The good news of the gospel is not just that you are forgiven, or that you can live forever, but that you can live forever with God. This is your hope in Jesus Immanuel. God does not want to stay in high heaven, in a perfect and strifeless existence. Instead, He chooses to descend and live in the womb of a woman and be born among his people. As we prepare ourselves through Advent, do not think of the cross. Instead, let His birth be a gift on its own. He did not merely come to die, but to live with us and among us. For thirty some odd years, those in and around Israel, get a taste of the life humans were made for, a life with God. In this moment, you get to live the hope of Immanuel. God is with you now. The Spirit of Jesus, the very person of God, lives with and in you. Because of Jesus, God is always near, and any time you want, you can take a moment of stillness like this and remember that our God forever chooses to be Immanuel, God with us. Your hope is not set in an immaterial future where we can leave this physical world behind to be with God in heaven.

On the contrary, the story of scripture always shows God coming to us. God came into the garden to walk with Adam. God came down into a bush to speak with Moses. Jesus came down to live as a human. The Spirit came down to live within humans. In the end, God will make a new earth and He will come down to live in it with us. God always comes to us. Even as we hope for a final day when we can live with God perfectly, we can live out that hope today of being united with God. As you take a moment to light the 1st candle, the Hope candle, let your hope be realized in His company daily. Let this flame remind you of His presence with you today. Pray: "Lord, you are my hope. As I prepare for the miracle of your birth, be present with me. Give me the eyes to see where you are every day." Then spend some time in prayer over the things you hope for that distract you from the hope you have in God's presence.