(Transition from video to sermon: When we know God is with us, it gives us a hope so powerful that fear loses its grip on us.)

One of the names for God that we often hear during Christmas time is *Emmanuel*, which means: *God with us*. (Isaiah 7:14) However, many times we don’t feel that God is with us.

Have you ever asked the question: *Is God with me?* Perhaps many of us here have asked this question. I know many people struggle with feelings of loneliness or abandonment at some point in their lives. They have felt the heavyweight of loneliness through the loss of people they love or missed opportunities in life or because they did not live up to what was expected from them and feel ashamed. These experiences set on us as a heavy burden and make us wonder if God cares about our lives or if God is with us at all. And when we begin to question if God wants us or even if God is real, that is when we learn what actual fear is.

In such times of loneliness, shame, or fear, when we are confused, tempted, hurting, or discouraged, there is one thing that is unwavering: the presence of God. I mean, would it make sense if God would only want to be with us when we are healthy and successful? Absolutely not; that will not reflect at all everything Jesus did and said.

King David was a person that loved God and was faithful—most of the time. He experienced guilt, persecution, betrayal, and intense fears. At one point, he felt so unworthy of himself that he was not sure whether God would want him anymore. But it was then that he realized the magnitude of God’s love for him. In Psalms 139: 7 he said,

“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?... I come to the end [and] I am still with you.”

If you read this whole chapter, you will see that king David was reflecting about a place and time where he may find himself truly alone, yet there is none. And, he says: I come to the end of everything I can possibly think of, and I am still with you.

I know we don’t always feel God’s presence or are hopeful about our future. I know we carry heavy concerns, doubts, and even anger for not being able to have things go the way we want to or hope for. But, that does not change who God is and what God does for us. That is the meaning of Christmas: God is always with us, wants to be with us, and has chosen to be with us no matter what.

Remember the message of the angels to the shepherds on the fields? They said,

“Do not be afraid; I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This is the message for us tonight, too: do not be afraid, ashamed, or discouraged anymore. God came because of you; you and all of us here are the reason for this “good news of great joy!”

So, if anything can be said about God, it is not: “why have you abandon us,” but “why do you keep insisting on being with us?” The God we believe in has chosen to be present in all of our pains and needs, in our hopes and dreams. Our God joins us in our brokenness and in our happiness. Our God knows us as we are, without any facades or pretentiousness and wants to be with us regardless.

Tonight, as we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us forever, let us know that when we are confused, God’s presence will guide us; when we are afraid, God’s presence will protect us; when we are tempted, God’s presence will help us resist; when we are hurting, God’s presence will comfort us; when we are discouraged, God’s presence will encourage us; when we are lonely, God’s presence will be our companion. God sees us, walks with us, and cares for us no matter where we are. He is here. Amen.