

IN THE FLESH

Andrew thought he had been playing pretty good ball. So when he didn't make the team he was shocked. And it felt like the bottom had fallen out. Basketball was his life.

He and his mom had always gone to church together. But since he'd been cut from the team, he hadn't been going. And that made things really tense at home. "When you're down, that's when you need church the most," she'd say.

"Oh, right," he'd think. "Where was God when I got cut from the team? Nobody understands."

On Christmas Eve, his mom said he had to go to church. He refused. Things got really ugly before she finally left without him.

As he sat alone in the apartment flipping the channels on TV, he never felt so empty.

One of the channels was showing a Christmas Eve service from a local church. And in his anger, he almost dared God to try to tell him something.

A girl was saying, "The young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (which means, *God is with us*).

Next it was a boy's turn: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

Then a teenager walked to the microphone and said, "That means that when Jesus came in the flesh, he was one of us, living with us. He knew what it was like to hurt. And it means you don't ever have to feel empty or alone. God doesn't like to see you hurt, but when you *are* hurting, God is with you still."

As the choir started to sing "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful," Andrew walked to the window. He stood for a while looking at the lights that lit up the city like a Christmas tree.

"Maybe," he thought, "if I hurry I could still make it to the church service tonight."

3 STATEMENTS

- God is always there for you.
- God wasn't content just to give a word of promise; God chose to put that Word in the flesh.
- God understands your pains and your pleasures because Jesus has been there.



JEFF GREENBERG

the
Source

GOD IS WITH YOU!

God is bigger than our ability to understand. For instance, God is eternal—no beginning, no end. There has never been a time when God was not, and there will never be a time when God will not be. God is *always*.

Also, God is everywhere. There is not a place where God is not. No matter where, God is *there*.

It's hard for us, who are limited by time (we have a beginning and an end), to understand that God is eternal. We simply can't relate to that.

It's hard for us, who are limited by space (we can only be at one place at a time), to understand that God is everywhere. We simply can't relate to that, either.

But thanks to God, the God who is eternal, and who is everywhere relates to you! God is always there for you.

Isn't that like our God, to come seeking when we can't even begin to understand? Just as God came looking for Adam and Eve, so God comes looking for you. Calling your name. Being *always there* for you.

The Bible tells the history of how God has always been there for God's people: providing for them, protecting them, being there for them. When they were happy and in the promised land, God was with them. When they were sad and in slavery in Egypt, God was with them. When they were wandering and in the desert, God was with them. When they were worshiping other gods and living in sin, God was with them. When they were distressed and in exile in Babylon, God was with them. No matter when or where, God was always there with God's people.

Then one day the prophet Isaiah had a vision that a virgin would become pregnant. And if that wasn't enough of a miracle, the baby would be called *Immanuel*, which means "God is with us."



One day the virgin Mary did have a son: Jesus, Immanuel. Imagine a God who chooses to be called Immanuel. What a name! In Jesus, God became one of us.

There is no way that we could ever be like God. Adam and Eve found that out the hard way. And so God chose to become like one of us.

There is no way that we could ever completely understand God, so God chose to understand us by becoming human.

There is no way that we can, on our own, relate to God, so God chose to relate to us by coming to us in the flesh.

Do you see how very much God loves you? Do you see that God has gone the distance to have a relationship with you? And that's not just once upon a time, 2000 years ago. Today—even now—*God is always there for you*.

FLESH OF OUR FLESH

All along God had promised to be with God's people. They had God's word that this was true. But *God wasn't content just to give a word of promise; God chose to put that Word in the flesh*.

"In the beginning was the Word" the gospel of John starts, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus was that Word. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us .

God wasn't content just to give a word of promise; God chose to put that Word in the flesh.

full of grace and truth." Jesus was that Word made flesh.

You may have heard the word *incarnate* or *incarnation*. This means "in-the-flesh." Jesus was God incarnate—God in-the-flesh. Immanuel.

Clearly, God is so big that we can't begin to understand God. But imagine, if you can, God emptying all God's bigness into a human form. It boggles the mind. The more you think of it, the more unbelievable it seems.

There have been many people who have found this *too* unbelievable. Some people say that Jesus was human, but not really God. There are also people who have said just the opposite: that Jesus was God, but not really human like we are human. Those who have trouble believing that Jesus was really human think that bodies are evil and God is good, so Jesus must have just been a mirage or an optical illusion that looked human.

The Bible tells us that people who think that way are wrong. Those who don't want to imagine God as suffering in the flesh have missed the beauty of the incarnation. The whole point is that God *did* choose to suffer and die. God chose this wonderfully precious way to show us love.

By taking on flesh, Jesus showed us how precious humans are. Jesus showed us how important our bodies are to God. Not only was Jesus born in a body, but he spent his life feeding, healing, and caring for people's bodies.

Jesus is God in human form, reflecting a perfect image of God. Jesus is God in the flesh, giving dignity to humanity and showing that our bodies are God's creation. And they are good.

Yes, Jesus is God. Yes, Jesus was human. Yes, Jesus knew what it was like to have growing joys and growing pains. Yes, Jesus was once your age.

And yes, our God, Jesus, understands!

GOD UNDERSTANDS

One of the loneliest feelings is when you feel like no one understands you. That's why it feels so good to have

a friend or parent who really knows you—really understands you. You never feel alone if that person is around. You feel like that person is really with you.

Well, God is like that.

God knows everything and understands everything. There are so many things about God that are hard to understand: God is eternal, God is everywhere, God knows everything. But, as always, God takes even what we can't understand and uses it for us. The God who understands all, also understands you.

But God wasn't content just to claim to understand you. God demonstrated it by becoming human. No distant God, here. Our God is nothing less than Immanuel. *God understands your pains and your pleasures, because Jesus has been there.*

Jesus' life 2000 years ago was just the beginning. Even now, as you read this, God is with you. God knows what you are feeling. God understands you. And all the while God understands you, God also loves you more than you can imagine. You've never had such a friend!

God is always there for you.



JOHN FRED SHARP/SHARP IMAGES



Read these Bible passages to hear about some of the emotions Jesus experienced. Then write your response.

1. Matthew 4:1. Jesus was experiencing

It reminds me of the time when I

2. Matthew 11:19. Jesus was experiencing

It reminds me of the time when I

3. John 2:13-16. Jesus was experiencing

It reminds me of the time when I

4. John 11:32-36. Jesus was experiencing

It reminds me of the time when I

I THINK

The Bible says that we are supposed to pray constantly. The Bible isn't kidding. God really wants you to pray

constantly. But that doesn't mean that God expects you to walk through the halls at school with your hands folded and your eyes closed.

What does God mean when God asks you to pray constantly?

Imagine that you are on a three-mile walk with a friend. During that walk you talk with each other for only one mile. What happens during the other two miles? How are you aware of your friend's presence? In what ways do you act differently than if you were walking alone?

Now, remember what Immanuel means? How is God like your three-mile hike friend? How can you pray constantly?

Shaping life

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE

There once was a man who worked in a monastery in France. He wasn't a monk. He was the kitchen worker. But his prayer life became an example to the world.

Others in the monastery called him "Brother Lawrence." He was born in France in the early 1600s. For him, prayer was not a "sometimes-thing" as if God were far away and came closer occasionally in prayer. For him, prayer was a constant awareness of the presence of God. During his whole life, he attempted to be present to the God who was always present to him. He lived his life in the presence of Immanuel.

On the scale below, where would you place yourself? Place an X along the line to indicate your response.

I pray:

seldom sometimes often

I live my life aware that God is with me:

seldom sometimes often

If I "practiced the presence of God" more, my life would probably be:

the same enriched a lot better



BETTS ANDERSON/JUNICORN

GRACE AND RESPONSE

We have seen in Jesus a God who stoops to serve us. God redeems us from our slavery to sin and death. Jesus buys us back, not with money "but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death."

And our God is with us still. God answers our every hope, our every need, our every fear with God's very presence in our lives.

God loves you, you who were otherwise "a lost and condemned person." What grace! God loves us though we don't deserve it.

"All this," Luther says, God has done "that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him."

How can we "live under God" now? By practicing God's presence in prayer.

How can we serve God? By serving others.

Session 19 talked about how God wants us to be servants. This session talks about how Jesus is with us. In fact, Jesus is so much with us that he is present to us in the needy people all around us. When we serve one of these people on earth, we are serving Jesus. You see, there is no such thing as only a private relationship with God. On the contrary. We respond to God's grace by serving in community.

And when we serve we are like Jesus the servant. When there is serving going on, Jesus is present in the servers and present in those who are served. When there is serving going on, that serving community becomes the body of Christ on earth. It is a serving community, fleshing out the almighty love of God.

Read Matthew 25:31-46. Here again, God shows us how important our bodies are. Jesus lists six kinds of bodily needs people have. List them and write what you could do to serve Jesus by serving others.

1. _____
I could _____
2. _____
I could _____
3. _____
I could _____
4. _____
I could _____
5. _____
I could _____
6. _____
I could _____

*God
understands
your pains and
your pleasures
because Jesus
has been
there.*

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

At no time was Jesus more human than when he suffered and died on the cross. The Bible remembers seven things Jesus said on the cross. Read these words and write down what you think he was feeling. Write down any other ideas that come to mind. Remember as you read and write, that what Jesus did, he did for you.

- John 19:26-27
- Luke 23:34
- John 19:28
- Luke 23:43
- John 19:30
- Luke 23:46
- Matthew 27:46

Memory

Continue to memorize Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. As an additional challenge, memorize one or more of the following: Matthew 1:23; Mat-

thew 25:40; Matthew 28:19-20; John 1:1, 14; Philipians 4:4-7.

Activity 1

Read the Nicene Creed found in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 64. Read the Athanasian Creed found in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 54. Make a three-column chart comparing what these creeds and the Apostles' Creed have to say about Jesus.

Activity 2

Bread for the World is an organization that tries to care for the hunger of the world by working for better legislation in the United States. To find out how you can become involved, write to Bread for the World, 802 Rhode Island Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20018.

Activity 3

As a class, write and perform a skit for your next Sunday school Christmas program. Focus on what the incarnation means for us today.

FOCUS

ON THE NICENE AND ATHANASIAN CREEDS

In addition to the Apostles' Creed, Lutherans also confess two other creeds. They are the Nicene Creed (*LBW* p. 64) and the Athanasian Creed (*LBW* p. 54).

It is not clear who wrote our creeds or when they were written. The creeds were modified and enlarged over the years.

From time to time, the leaders of the church would gather together for *councils*. These councils were meetings very similar to church conventions. The councils would shape creedal statements to combat false teachings and to make a clear statement of what the church believed.

For the most part, the Nicene Creed reached its present form around the time of the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

We do not know who wrote the Athanasian Creed, but it probably dates from the fifth or sixth century A.D.