Sermon Notes – December 21, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 1: 18-25
Peace Lutheran Church
"O Come, O Come!"

As Advent draws to its conclusion, we along with Mary and Joseph, anticipate the birth of the Son of God. Interestingly, in both the Isaiah reading and in the angelic instructions given to Joseph (as recorded by Matthew), the child is not named "the Son of God is with us" or "the Son of God saves." He is named *Immanuel,* meaning "God is with us"; Jesus means "God saves."

Is there a difference between "the Son of God is with us" and "God is with us"? Trinitarian theology might try to reassure us that the answer is "no"-but our gut-level spiritual experience might lead us to say "Yes!" Believing that God "sent someone" to save us *feels* different from hearing that God's own *Self* came - even as God mysteriously remained (and remains) omnipresent, omnipotent, and eternal. A penal substitutionary theology of atonement - which emphasizes God the Father sending the Son to be the sacrifice for sin in order to satisfy the wrath of a just God - is a dominant Christology in much of contemporary culture. But today's texts point us toward a different and ancient) Christology that sees the Incarnation as God's *communion with us* - a mind-boggling revelation of radical love. It's not (merely?) that "the Son of God is with us." No, today we hear that *"God is with us."*

In some impossible-to-explain way (and for an impossible-to-explain reason), God will take on flesh and be joined with us who are not God. Somehow He is with us in this vulnerable, helpless infant. God-with-us will live, laugh, walk, love, hunger, grow weary, suffer, and die. The very God who is immortal, omniscient, and omnipotent will come into our space and experience what it is like to be born, grow up, lose loved ones, feel rage, face temptations, know betrayal, and endure torture. The perfect and all-wise God will even know what it is to cry out, "My God, how could you leave me here like this?"

Think of that for a moment! Not only will this incarnated God feel human vulnerability and weakness, but this incarnated God will understand what it feels like *to be afraid that God has abandoned you*. And

will hang there in that space be with us so that we might begin to see the depth of the love that brought this God to us.

Of course, since we believe that God is omniscient, we might assume that God would understand us thoroughly anyway, even without the incarnation. But how would we know? How would we trust? God has chosen this incarnational space of radical communion to assure us that He does know us - our joys, our sufferings, and our sins. He has chosen this incarnational of radical communion to reveal to us the promise that He is truly with us, and that His judgment will be against death itself and all its workings.