

All right. Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. Man, it's good to be together. It's good to be the church. And Valley Creek is one church that meets at multiple campuses. And we carry the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. And all Christmas season long, those locations fan out all over the place. Into office Christmas parties and into homes and airports and shopping centers. Here's what I want to say to you. Don't forget to carry hope with you. Inside of you is a treasure chest of hope that the world desperately needs. So, don't forget to carry that hope with you wherever you go. And listen, you can't release hope in a hurry. You've got to slow down, look the people in the eye, talk to them, walk at the pace of grace, the pace of Jesus. You can't release hope in a hurry all Christmas season long. May we be hope carriers. May we carry it everywhere we go. All right, last week we got a chance to start a little Christmas series leading into the Christmas holiday just called The Name Behind Christmas.

We know a whole bunch about Christmas, don't we? We know the festivities behind Christmas. We know the celebrations behind Christmas. We know the movies behind Christmas. We even know some of the carols behind Christmas. Many of those have bells in the name. We got jingle bells. We got silver bells. We got to heard the bells on Christmas Day. We got other songs about bells. We even know this phrase, every time a bell rings and an angel gets its wings, that's horrible theology. It's really bad. There's like an angel up in heaven somewhere like, "Come on, guys. Come on, anybody. Silver bells, jingle bells, taco bells, I don't care. I've been waiting." Bad, it's really bad. It's not good. But the name behind Christmas is so much more than just all the things we know about Christmas. See, there's a name behind Christmas because Christmas is when God put a face to his name.

For years and years and years we were waiting. We didn't know what God really looked like. That is until a Christmas 2,000 years ago when God finally put a face to his name. He came down in the form of a baby in a manger. We got to see what the face of love looked like, and it is the name that's above every name. Hope has a name. And whenever the name of Christmas is spoken in heaven, the angels say, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive honor and glory and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created, and they have their being." What is that name? It's Jesus. Jesus is the name behind Christmas, and salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

There is no other name which salvation is found, not in a celebrity, not in a president, not in me, myself, and I. It's only in Jesus, and his name is a gift that's given to us, given to mankind. That means we can open up the gift. We can use it. We can call upon the name of Jesus, and things begin to change. Like, watch this. Jesus. Jesus. We say his name, and the atmosphere changes. Jesus. Someone's depression begins to lift. Jesus. Someone who hasn't forgiven themselves all these years, you're starting to let forgiveness in. Jesus. Someone's hearing and experiencing the presence of God for the first time. Jesus. There's power in that name. Jesus, as I speak it out, there's a healing that happens. Heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Jesus. When you speak the name of Jesus, everything changes. His name is above every name. Salvation is found in no other name, and it's a gift. And every time we lift up the name of Jesus, it lifts our heads. Every time we speak the name of Jesus, it renews our minds. Every time we call upon the name of the Lord, it begins to settle our hearts. And you see, Jesus is so big, and God is so great, that one name can't contain all the realities of His personhood. One name can't contain the realities and the emotions and the attributes of God. That's why Scripture calls Him by many names. Rabbi, Teacher, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Holy One, First and Last, Alpha and Omega, the One who was and is and is to come. And last week we learned that one of His names is Prince of Peace, because Jesus Himself has become our peace.

He's actually removed the dividing line of hostility between God and man, and He is our peace. He's our peace in the midst of chaos, and even when things are chaotic all around here, things can be at peace inside of here, because Jesus is our Prince of Peace. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, through psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Let the peace of Christ rule. Wherever Jesus rules, His peace reigns. Wherever the kingdom rules, peace is the result. Whenever we practice the ways of Jesus, we experience the peace of Jesus, and the practices of Jesus are actually pathways of peace. So, all year long we've been practicing and learning to be a people of peace, and even our practice plan right now is to enjoy God and the life that He's given you.

All Christmas season long, we're enjoying God and the life that He's given you. Doesn't the rest of this passage just look like enjoyment? Like speaking to one another in this way, teaching one another, soft words among us, gratitude in our hearts. My question for you is, what if all Christmas long you look like this? Like with your family and coworkers and in conversations, this kind of peace that dwells and richly among you and so much gratitude? Jesus is our Prince of Peace. And that leads us to another amazing name behind Christmas. This is one you're familiar with, and we learn the name when we learn about the story of Joseph and Mary. And Joseph has just found out that Mary is pregnant with child. And he's like, what? And he has it in mind to just separate from her quietly, but he's an honorable man, so he has this conversation with an angel, and the angel's like, "No, don't do that. Don't leave Mary. See, she's going to give birth to a son."

"You're to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. Emmanuel, God with us. The way that God would save us was to be with us, to become one of us so he could possibly save all of us. God was going to come down so he could take us back up. Why? Because God doesn't do salvation from a distance. He doesn't do salvation from far off. He comes in close. He draws near. Have you ever just stopped to think for a second, God with us?

God came down. The creator of all things came down, and he moved into our neighborhood, and he's here, and he's available. Christmas is when God came close, and he is with us, and he will never leave us, and he is for us.

And that means no matter what I'm facing, whether on the highest mountain or even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. So, God with us makes us fearless, and the kingdom of darkness hates it when you're fearless because they want you to live in fear because fear is the power play of the kingdom of darkness. Why? Because if Satan can keep you bound up in fear, then you're never released to the beautiful future that God has called you to. So, God with us makes you fearless, and Satan hates that. When Adam and Eve ate from the fruit that they weren't supposed to eat from in the garden, one of the first things they say is, "We heard you in the garden, and we were afraid, and so we hid." And so, God with us is really the antidote to fear because perfect love casts out fear, and because God is perfect love, he comes and he drives out fear. In case you didn't know this, there's this pattern in scripture about God with us.

Ready? So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. Check this one out. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. God with us is the antidote to fear. And these are interesting verses because these were spoken to the Israelites. If you remember in the story of the Israelites, they struggled to remember that God was with them. They lived in a lot of fear. What I want you to see in the pattern of those two verses is that like moms and dads, you can't help your kids not be fearful by just saying, "Oh, don't be afraid. Don't be worried. Don't be anxious." It's actually not enough because there's not enough substance to it. You have to add, "Don't be afraid. Jesus is with you today. Don't have anxiety."

"The Lord is with you, and he's filling up your heart and your mind." So, have you been experiencing much fear recently? Fear of finances, fear of the future, fear of what's going on in your body because when you know that God is with you, you're fearless, you're courageous. And the Israelites, they struggled with that. They forgot that God was with them many times, and they struggled with fear because they were so used to being afraid from 400 years of being told what to do and being afraid by slave drivers and taskmasters that they struggled to realize that they didn't have to be afraid, that God was with them. And it was so frustrating that Moses would have to have these conversations with God and be like, "They're driving me nuts. I don't know why they're so afraid all the time. They want to just do the opposite of everything they should be doing." And God and Moses have this back and forth, and God's like, "I agree with you. They're a pretty stiff-necked people. They have a hard time moving one way or the other. They're so on the same track that they're used to." So, they had this conversation. The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses."

"I'll give you rest." And Moses said to him, "If you don't personally go with us, don't even make us leave this place. How's anyone going to know that you look favorably on me and on

your people if you don't go with us for your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all the other people on the earth?" God says, "This is how you actually experience rest when you know that I'm with you." So, can I ask you, is your soul at rest this season? Do you feel restful or restless? And I think part of the reason that we feel restless is that we'll make these plans. We got this game plan and we get that new job or that new life or move to that new place or go to that new school. And a lot of that we do in our own strength and without God. So, we make the plans and we go and do the thing and we finally get the thing and we feel as restless as we did before we had the thing.

And I think part of why that happens is that we forgot one important truth that the Israelites, they always forgot this. The desert with God is better than any promised land without him. And any promised land with God is beautiful, but any promised land that I think is like a promised land, "I got the thing, I got the promotion, I got the job, we moved, we looked forward to it, I got that thing, but God's not with me. It turns out that thing is actually a desert because the place doesn't matter without the person." The place doesn't matter without the person personally go with us, that's the only thing that matters. And when you do, you can give us rest, you can set us apart, you will be with us. So, it's possible that if we feel restless in our souls this Christmas season, we're missing a chance to remember, "God's with me. And no matter what I'm going into, if he's with me, then I'm good to go. God is with me and he will give me rest."

One of the things that always pains my heart when I think about the story of the Israelites is that it seems like they always forgot that God was with them and they always forgot that they were literally being led by a giant pillar of fire in the middle of their encampment. Think about this for a second. There's a giant pillar of fire in the middle of their encampment. So, at nighttime it was a fire, in the daytime it was a cloud, right, this tower. We don't know how tall it was. It was probably really big. And that fire served a couple purposes. It was attractive and it was protective. It was attractive to the people that were in the area, like "What is that? You guys see that over there?" And it was protective, like, "Don't mess with us," because there's a fire in the middle of the encampment. Like the presence of God is actually right smack in the middle of where we are. Can you imagine if some bandits out there somewhere were like, "Okay guys, I got a great idea. The Israelites are out in the desert. They don't really have like a city or any protection. I heard that they took all the gold of Egypt and so here's what I was thinking."

"We should get our bandits together and we should pillage and bandit and get all their gold." "Bill, that's a great idea. Let's enact that. Go get the horses." And they get the horses, then they ride out and they're looking at the Israelites and then they see a giant pillar of fire and they're like, "I'm good." And then they head back home because they knew they couldn't mess with the presence of God because the fire was there to warm and it was there to warn the people, don't mess with us. There's a fire in the middle. So, could it be that we struggle with things like courage and boldness and fear because we've forgotten that in Jesus and with the

Holy Spirit, there's a fire in the middle. I got a fire in the middle of me so I don't have to get messed with, but if I say I'll never mention the Lord or speak His name, His word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones. I got a fire in the middle and His word is stoking that fire and the fire is pressing out my fear and God is with me."

Have you forgotten that if you're in Jesus, you got a fire in the middle? Emmanuel, God with us. I was thinking about this. You know what we need to do? We need to have some more of that like bring your dad to school day confidence. You remember when you bring your dad to school and it'd be like, "It doesn't matter if dad's an accountant or a dentist or an NFL football player, my dad is with me today. You can't mess with me, dad's with me. By the way, my dad could probably beat up your dad. In fact, he'd probably beat up your dad in the parking lot because he's a dentist. My dad's with me." I take my dad to school, it's like marketing in healthcare. "What's your dad do?" "I don't even know, but dad is with me at school today and it's awesome." We need a little bit more of that kind of confidence because Emmanuel, your dad is with you and if God is with you, then He's for you and if God's for you, then who or what could be against you?

Church, can I just speak this to you for a second? Do you think God is like with this church? Is He with us? Okay. So then, if you're part of this church, if you have the Holy Spirit, He's with you and if He's with you, He's for you and if He's for you, then who or what could ever be against you? There's a fire in the middle and the fire is attractive and it's protective. This Christmas season, we have a chance to show the fire. It's attractive. Look at what the Lord has done. Look how He's moving and protective. "Hey, kingdom of darkness, don't mess with me. My dad is with me today. It's a take your dad to school day. There's lots of confidence in my day, in my life and I'm confident in God day and night. I will bless the Lord who guides me. Even at night, my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken. He is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad and I rejoice."

"My body rests in safety." I want to speak this to somebody who's listening right now. Recently, you've been sleeping horribly and sleep has been a struggle. It's actually been part of how you've been attacked. In Jesus' name, I speak over you, amazing sleep all Christmas long. May you have an experience with Jesus that even at night, your heart is at peace. Your body rests in safety because God is with you and He's filling up your heart and your mind while you sleep. Many times, our night mirrors our days. So, when our thoughts in the day are all disheveled, our night kind of feels disheveled. But this is a beautiful passage. I'd encourage you to memorize this. I'd encourage you to speak it out over you and your kids. Even at night, your heart instructs you. Your body will rest in safety because God with you. Because God's with you. So, you can have a confidence that He is with you, even at night, no matter what you're facing. May you have amazing sleep this Christmas season.

Jesus is with His church. Jesus is with us. So, let's go back to that for a second. If God is with us, if God is for us, then what or who can be against us? Let me answer that for you. You, you

can be against you. Me, I can be against me. And you think, "Oh, well, no, the forces of darkness." I know, but those are already defeated by Jesus at the cross. And so, now, it really is your mind can start to be against you. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your own minds, fascinating. Not enemies, enemies in your own minds because of your evil behavior, but now He's reconciled you by Christ's physical body Emmanuel, God with us, through death to present you holy in His sight without blemish and free from accusation. Free from accusation. You know who primarily accuses? Satan. And you know when he has the power? When in our minds, we agree with it.

And so, God with us helps to clear our minds and helps to show us what's true and good and right. And Satan wants to keep accusing us and confusing us in our minds. Here's three ways he primarily wants to confuse us about God with us. Ready? Fear, distance, and disappointment. We've already been talking about fear, that he tries to make you afraid of all kinds of things in your life. Let's talk about distance for a second. Have you ever said this before? I feel like I'm far from God. Or I feel like God's far away. If you've ever said that, then you're not alone. And that's a common feeling, distance. Can I just tell you? God is not far away. In fact, he's very close in Jesus. Christmas is when God closed the distance. He's no longer far away. In fact, in Jesus, he lives inside of you. So, really, it's actually impossible for God to be far away when I have the Holy Spirit living inside of me.

It's possible that in my own mind, I feel like he's far away, but he's not actually far away. If you feel like God's far away, just understand he hasn't moved. And so, you might feel that way, but that's one of the ways that Satan tries to accuse us and confuse us about what's really true. God with us shows us that God is not distant. He's close. In fact, he's closer than a brother. So, God with us makes us fearless. God with us shows us God is not distant. And God with us means that God is not disappointed with us. You ever said this before? "I think God might be kind of disappointed in me." Hmm. So, let's talk about that. God is not disappointed in you. In fact, in Jesus, he can't be disappointed with you because he's very pleased with Jesus inside of you. And disappointment doesn't even really make any sense when you say it because the definition of disappointment is this. I thought one thing was going to happen, and then something else happened, and now the level between those two things is the level of my disappointment.

Here's the things, I thought one thing was going to happen, but then something else happened, and so the gap between those is my disappointment. When does God ever think one thing is going to happen, but then something else happens? He's like, "Oh my goodness, oh, what happened?" That's disappointment. So, by definition, God is not only not disappointed in you, he loves you. And in Jesus, he not only loves you, he really likes you. So, he's not disappointed. He's actually really pleased with who Jesus in your life is, and you think, "Well, what about all the ways I act, all those kinds of things?" Man, he doesn't want you to do that. He doesn't want you to sin. He doesn't want you to live in brokenness. That doesn't mean he's disappointed with you, like the whole thing, like all this. That means he wants you to live

the life worthy of your calling, and for those that don't have Jesus, just one more thing. God's not disappointed with you. He just doesn't know you. But he wants to, and he loves you.

And Christmas is when Jesus came down so that he could know you, and you could know the Father. Christmas and Easter, Christmas and the cross, those are the two reminders of how far God will go to get us back. If you don't have Jesus, you're really far from God, but man, he wants you to draw close. He wants to draw near to you. Maybe this Christmas is when you could say, "I'm in for that. I want Emmanuel, God, to be with me in my life, not just out here, in here." So, God with us makes us fearless. God with us means there's no more distance, and God with us proves God is not disappointed with us. Listen, if God is with me, it means he's never not with me, and he'll never leave me. Do you understand that once Jesus came, he actually never left? You're like, "Wait, but didn't he go back to heaven?" He did, but he decided to leave another of himself. He said, I will ask the Father, he will give you another one like me, a comforter, an advocate, an intercessor, a counselor, a strengthener, a standby to be with you forever.

God with us means that God was here, and he actually never left here, because through the Holy Spirit, we still have all of these things, a helper when we need him, a comforter who comforts us in all of our troubles so that we can give others the comfort we've received from him, an advocate fighting on our behalf, an intercessor that's actually speaking to the Father all the time on our behalf, a counselor that shows us the way to go, a strengthener that gives us his strength when we feel weak, and a standby. He's always right here. He's always right with us. That's who Jesus is. That's the promise of Christmas. In fact, it's not just a name behind Christmas. Emmanuel is a promise behind Christmas. And the promise is God with us means us with God forever. The promise is God with us means there gets to be an us with God forever. Check this out. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?

And ready? If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies because of the spirit who lives in you. One of the greatest things about Christmas is it's not just about the name of Jesus. It's about the promise of Jesus. And the promise is God with us means us with God forever. Jesus came down for 33 years so that we can go up and be with him forever. That's incredible. It's a promise for us. The promise behind Christmas, God with us, means us with God forever. What a gift. What a promise. That's amazing. God came down to take us back up. Jesus came down to earth in a manger as a baby so that you, so that I could rise back up to be with him forever.

God with us means us with God forever. That's beautiful. You see, when you know that God is with you, you know whose you are, you know where you came from, you know why you're here, and you know where you're going. You know whose you are. You are the Father's. You know where you came from, from the Father. You know why you're here, to do the Father's work with him, not for him, with him, and you know where you're going, to go be with the Father forever. Man, that's a confidence, that's a courage, that's a hope in which there is no end. God with us

means us with God forever. I hope that encourages your heart this Christmas season. One more. Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights. Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

Can I ask you, are you in the deepest depths right now? Are you in the highest heights? Are you on the mountain? Are you in the valley? In any of those situations, if you ask the Lord, he will answer, he will give you a sign. The sign is his name, Emmanuel, God with us. And when you realize God is with us, eventually you start to realize that the highest heights or the deepest depths, they're all kind of the same thing. Because I have the person, so the place doesn't so much matter. I have Jesus, so the situation is really secondary. Highest of heights, deepest of depths, God is with me. Okay. So, here's what I want to do. I want to take a little bit of time to not just talk about it, but to experience it.

The kingdom of God is not just a matter of talk, it's a matter of power. So, would you do me a favor? Would you close your eyes with me? Can I ask you to even just open your hands and maybe, if you're willing, just place them there on your lap. Open hands are a sign of willingness, surrender. And let's experience Emmanuel, God with us. So, take in a deep breath, and as you do, know that God is the breath in your lungs. And I want you to begin to think about the fact that God is with you. He's holding you together. Literally the cells and the molecules in your body are being held together by God right now. The chair you're sitting on, the room you're listening to this, it's all being sustained and held together by Jesus, the word, God himself.

He's in front of you. He's behind you. He's to the sides of you. He's just above your head. He's on the floor below. In your past, in your present, in your future, God with us. Can you begin to feel him right now? For those of us that have Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit is not just in the space that we're in. He's on the inside. Right now, there's a fire in the middle. Can you feel the warmth? Can you feel this fire begin to just move right from the middle of your body into the center of your body, into your arms and your fingers, down through your legs and your toes, up through your face and your head?

The fire of God, the Holy Spirit. There's a fire in the middle to warm, to warn, attractive, protective. He's on the inside. Emmanuel, God with you. Take just a moment, and I'm going to let it go quiet, and just feel that God is with you.

So, thank you, Jesus, that you're with us. And even taking a second like that to just experience your presence, we don't want that to just be like on a Sunday morning or one time. That could be all the time. So, over your church, I speak of fearlessness. I speak of confidence that you're not distant, you're close, and that you're not disappointed. You're well pleased with your people. That because you're with us, you're for us. And because you're for us, then nothing and no one can be against us all season long. May we lift up the name of Jesus. May we know



that Emmanuel, God is with us, and he's leading our lives and our church and our families and our homes. And his presence changes everything, because there's a fire in the middle. And that fire is always with us, protecting, guiding, leading, and showing the world that Jesus is beautiful, and he's attractive, and he's actually the name that's not only above every name, he's the one that's worth following.

He is the one worth putting at the very front, the forefront of our life. So, Jesus, would you show us more what it looks like to be a people that believe God is with us. You are the name above every name. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Thank you, God, for your name. Thank you that Emmanuel, God, is with us. Amen.