

## Christmas 2019

So back in 2017 – 2 Christmases ago

A message about forgiveness – healing – reconciliation

I felt like it was what people really needed at the time

Finished the message – 2018: A Year of Reconciliation

Indeed it was – more healing – more freedom

So last Christmas – thought about what people need

Heaviness – depression – suicide

A message about joy – great joy to all people

Finished the message – 2019: A Year of Great Joy

It really caught on – people loved having years with themes

Joke – LSU

Wasn't trying to start a new tradition

But began the process of preparing for this Christmas – theme?

2020 – Obvious theme – you'll probably hear this everywhere

“A year of vision” – focus – clarity – “2020 vision”

Actually started preparing messages

But when I prayed I sensed something different...

I think there's a desperate need for the power of God

I think people need Holy Spirit encounters

I think people want more than religion – they need miracles

I think they want more than a belief system

I think people want a presence-filled Christianity

We've flooded the church world with preaching – information

We're in information overload – Instagram – YouTube

People aren't looking for information

They're looking for transformation

Even lost people know ABOUT God

They're looking for an experience WITH God  
Information is everywhere – Transformation is scarce

I heard the Holy Spirit say...

People shouldn't come to church looking for God and only find us.

2018: Year of Reconciliation

2019: Year of Great Joy

2020: Year of God Encounters

A year where we will do everything to make room for a move of God

A year where we believe God for more

Nothing weird or man-made

But if God is real – if God is alive

We need encounters with Him – never the same

Give us a year of your life – New series in January

## The Christmas Story

What does that have to do with Christmas?

Actually a lot – my favorite part of the Christmas story

(Matthew 1:18-21) This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Makes sense – because Jesus means “God saves”

It was a common name – not unique

Even today – still used

Joke – Mexican restaurant – Jesus – thank you Jesus

And most people know Him as Savior

But He’s more than a Savior

(Matthew 1:23) The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,  
and they will call him Immanuel --which means, “God with us.”

His Name is Jesus – But they will call Him something else

Sort of like a nickname

I love nicknames – endears you to the person a bit more

Describes the person a little better

His Name is Jesus – but they will call Him – Immanuel

Why did would they call Him that?

God with us is so different – never had that before

Different from the religion they grew up with

OT vs. NT – external vs. internal – heaven vs. earth

God knew we needed more than the external – far away God

We needed Someone to be with us

Christmas is all about the greatest gift ever

More than a Savior – God with us

He continues to be with us – through the Holy Spirit

(John 14:16-17 NLT) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

Question: You might know His mission – Savior  
But do you know the Man – God with us?

Story – my testimony – Christmas 1978  
More than religion – it was an encounter with God

## God With Us

“God with us” is one of the best parts of being a Christian  
I rely on it so much in ministry  
Some of you here today need to experience God’s presence  
That’s our prayer

1. For when we’re afraid – sad – confused

Watched the presence of God make all of the difference

Story – Jess Johnson – others who are missing someone

2. For when you feel helpless on your own

Battling disease – addiction

Story – freedom

3. For when you’re not sure about God

I think some are still skeptical – not sure  
What makes us different from any other faith?  
How do you know if it’s really real?

In all of my reading and study of the Bible  
I have never found any person in the Scriptures

Who came to God because of a great explanation

Those who were convinced had a power encounter

They never questioned God – instead wouldn't back down

(1 John 4:13 NLT) And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

Story – Louis Viamonte