

The sermon “God with us—Right Here!”
From Matthew 1:18-25
By Rev. Peter Blank
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“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”
Those words from Psalm 80 sound like a prayer written for “times like ours”.

The psalmist is crying out to a God who feels distant. The people feel worn down, anxious, unsure of what comes next. They speak of tears as daily bread. They long for God to show up again—to turn toward them, to shine, to restore.

And if we’re honest, many of us know that prayer by heart.

We pray it when the news is heavy.

We pray it when families are strained.

We pray it when we feel tired in our faith, when hope feels thin,
when we wonder whether God sees what we are carrying.

“Restore us, O God.”

Not someday. Not far away.

But NOW!

And then we turn the page to Matthew’s Gospel, and we discover that God’s answer to that ancient prayer comes in a way no one expected.

Matthew tells us the story from Joseph’s side—a man trying to do the right thing in a situation that makes no sense. Joseph is faithful, decent, and heartbroken. He’s planning quietly. Carefully. He’s trying to manage a future that has already slipped out of his control.

And that's when God shows up—not with thunder, not with spectacle—but in a dream. An angel says, “Do not be afraid.” Those words are almost always the first sign that God is near.

“Do not be afraid... for the child conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. And you shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew then reaches back to Isaiah and gives us the name that changes everything:

Emmanuel.

God with us.

Not God above us.

Not God far ahead of us.

But God “with” us.

Psalm 80 cries out for restoration. Matthew tells us how God answers: not by fixing everything instantly, but by “entering everything fully”.

God does not stay distant from tears; God is born into them.

God does not shout instructions from heaven; God takes on flesh and breath and vulnerability.

God does not wait for the world to be ready; God comes right into the mess.

Emmanuel means God is with us in uncertainty.

With us in strained relationships.

With us in grief and worry and exhaustion.

With us in ordinary days and anxious nights.

Right here.

And that changes how we live.

Because if God is with us, then we are never alone in our waiting.
If God is with us, then even unfinished stories are held by hope.
If God is with us, then restoration is already beginning—even if we can't see it yet.

Notice what Joseph does after the dream. He wakes up—and he acts. He takes Mary as his wife. He names the child Jesus. He steps into a future he doesn't fully understand, trusting that God is already there.

That's faith—not having all the answers, but moving forward knowing you're not moving alone.

So when we pray the psalm again—
“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved”—
we do so knowing what that shining face looks like.

It looks like a child wrapped in swaddling cloth.
It looks like love made visible.
It looks like God choosing nearness over distance, presence over perfection.

God with us—right here.
Right now.
And always.

Thanks be to God.