

DECEMBER 18 2025 FATHER BRANDEN GORDON

Time is our most precious commodity. It's a non-renewable resource. Once a moment passes, that's it. It's gone forever.

That is why the surest sign of one's love for someone is to give one's time to him or her—to spend time with and be present to the beloved.

Why did God create us? It's not because He needed us, for God was perfectly happy without us. The most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have experienced perfect joy from all eternity, a joy which arises from their infinite love for each other.

God created us not because He needs us, but because He wants us to share in His eternal joy. He made us because He loves us, and the way that He expresses this love is by being present to us—by spending time with us.

God's desire to be with us is evident from the opening chapters of the Bible. We read in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve, our first parents, heard the sound of the Lord God walking about in the garden.

I think that we too easily dismiss such language in the Old Testament as mere poetic licence. We say that God couldn't have literally walked in the garden with our first parents because He had not yet become incarnate in Jesus. Yet we see angels appearing in physical form all throughout the Bible, and we don't even bat an eye.

During some of these appearances, angels even engage in physical activities. If angels could eat and drink with Abraham, then surely God could have walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. God's love for our first parents was such that He wanted to be with them. He wanted to spend time with them in the garden He had planted for their enjoyment.

What intimacy Adam and Eve must have experienced with God—that is, until their tragic fall into sin. And then there was God's fateful question to Adam: "Where are you?"

We read that Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees. If the scene weren't so tragic, it would be comical. Adam and Eve were like infants who hide their faces behind their hands while playing peekaboo and think that because they can't see their parents, their parents can't see them.

God is all-knowing, so He knew exactly where Adam and Eve were hiding. "Where are you" was a question not about their physical location, but about their spiritual state. God was, in effect, saying: "I am here. I love you and I want to be with you, but sin has caused you to hide from my presence. Where has sin taken you?"

With the question "Where are you," God isn't admitting His defeat in a game of hide and seek. Rather, He was prompting our first parents to an examination of conscience. "Where are you" is a question that would continue to re-echo throughout the rest of human history—except that it would be human beings who would begin to ask it of God.

Faced with the many consequences of our sins—injustice, poverty, violence, sickness, and death—we constantly find ourselves crying out to God: "Where are You? Why do You hide Your face from us?"

Well, today's gospel reveals God's answer to this question. An angel appears to Saint Joseph in a dream and assures him that Mary has conceived of the Holy Spirit. By commissioning Joseph to name the child Jesus, the angel reveals to him that he has been given fatherly authority over the child, for naming a child is a parental prerogative.

The author of this passage then does something very interesting. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Saint Matthew takes an ancient prophecy and applies it to the incarnation:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

For Matthew, the coming of Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy. For Jesus is God Himself, in the flesh. Jesus is literally God with us—Immanuel.

At various moments in the Old Testament, God assumes a physical form and appears to human beings. But it's only in the New Testament that God permanently unites a human nature to Himself, becoming like us in all things but sin. This is the marvel of the incarnation. This is the fullest meaning of Immanuel.

Jesus has ascended into heaven, but He is not content with loving us from afar. Just as the Divine Word walked with our first parents in the garden, so does He continue to walk with us today. Wherever two or three gather in Jesus's name—Immanuel, God is with us. Whenever we read the sacred scriptures—Immanuel, God is with us. And above all, when we are in the presence of the most holy Eucharist—Immanuel, God is with us.

Today's gospel reveals God's desire to be with us. The surest sign of God's love is that He spends time with us and is present to us, His beloved children, in so many ways.

And so, as we scramble to make final preparations for Christmas during this last week of Advent—to find that perfect gift for a loved one—remember that the greatest gift that we can give someone is our time, our loving presence.

This is the message of today's gospel. This is the true meaning of Immanuel.