

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and
bear a son, and shall call his name
Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14b



A Christmas Message from Bishop Hoyme

Dear Friends of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin,

The year was 1986 and it was a beautiful December morning in our new home in Minnesota. We had recently moved and I was preparing my Christmas Eve message for my new congregation. But I was having difficulty focusing on the task at hand. Each time I attempted to pen relevant and impressive thoughts, my eyes were diverted to a photo on my desk; a photo of a baby with thick dark hair and deep brown eyes. Although we had never met, she had been named and she was loved.

Her name was Laura and Lutheran Social Services had assured us that she would soon be on a plane that would fly her from Seoul, South Korea to the Minneapolis airport and then into our arms. But for now, she was in a crib in an orphanage in a faraway land. And that made me sad...

I was sad because this little one would spend her first Christmas alone... or as alone as one can be in a room filled with cribs. But she would not be held in the arms of loving parents and surrounded with gifts. And that was sad. And it made me feel alone.

But I had a sermon to write... so back to the words in my Bible and back to the story they told.

"Immanuel" - God with us. This word is first written in the book of Isaiah and then again in the Gospel of Matthew. Both times it is written as a promise that God will be with us, and God will never leave us. It is a promise that a baby will one day be born and that baby will fulfill the promise of God's presence with God's people.

Oh my goodness...could this be true? Could God's promise not be an ancient one, but one that was being fulfilled, even as I attempted to write a message of hope to my new people? Is God really with us?

Her first Christmas; wrapped in cloths and lying in a hard bottomed crib in the center of a faraway orphanage. And God is with her. God had knit her together in her mother's womb, and God would never leave her. And her name was Laura. And she was a child of God.

I remember this beautiful December morning often. I remember it when I am feeling alone. I remember it because I need to believe that God is with me. And that God will never leave me. And I believe it.

This will be my last Christmas message to you as your bishop. Next year at this time, you will read words from a new bishop but the promise will not change. God is with you. His name is Immanuel and the promise is real.

Have a blessed Christmas and... go to church! God will be there!

Rev. Robert A. Hoyme