

**Series:** *THE INCREDIBLE INVASION*—December 12, 2006

**RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH GOD**  
**Matthew 1:18-25**

**I. INTRO**

- A. How many of you will be having guests coming to stay with you this Christmas? How many of you are **happy** about that? How many of you aren't? How many of you are afraid to say, because the invaders belong to the person next to you—and you'll be in deep weeds if you give the wrong answer?
- Most of us don't mind a small invasion now and then—**if** we know it's coming. I mean, we **say** things like, "Hey, why don't you stop over some time!" But we're just being magnanimous...**lying** actually. It's code language for, "If you give me 3 weeks notice, I really would like to spend some time with you!"
1. See, our deal is, **no surprises!** We would like to have it all nailed down, all figured out—and have everything all planned out. I really should qualify that—no **bad** surprises. We don't mind good surprises. A lottery win; a sudden promotion; finding a great friend; your credit card company loses your bill—right after Christmas.
  2. But, truth is, life isn't like that. Things happen right under our noses—things we can't stop and things we can't fix. And for a bunch of control freaks like us, that's not good news.
- B. The Christmas story, as I mentioned last week, is the story of an invasion, of sorts. Prophets had said for hundreds of years, "There's a Messiah coming! He'll be born in Bethlehem—of a Virgin. He'll be different than anyone you've ever met. He'll be someone you'd **want** in your home!
- So, one day when the world had gotten very grim and very sad, he showed up. He came to a world that desperately needed good news. It was oppressed by Caesar Augustus--a Roman Emperor who ruled a bigger part of the world than anyone had before—or has since. The *pax romana*, or **Roman Peace** he claimed to bring looked good as a slogan on coins, but ran red with the blood of people who were slaughtered...or glistened with the sweat of people who were made into slaves. Herod, the guy who ruled Palestine was a kind of smaller clone of Augustus.
1. And people **prayed** for an invasion, "Oh God! Right **now** would be a really good time to show up!" We now know, God did. From the perspective of 2000 years, the story of Christmas—of God's invasion—seems beautiful, quaint, picturesque—magical. Filled with shepherds, angels, mysterious foreign visitors, and **stars!** Oh—and a **baby!** What could be more beautiful than a **Baby!** Babies are cute, safe, tiny—cuddly!

-The beauty and majesty of this story, though, is due to the fact that it has been touched by the hand of God. And everything He touches—from smelly stables and messy births—to bloody forms of execution—are somehow changed.

  - 2. Whatever you happen to think about the craziness that surrounds Christmas in 2006—you know, from the belly-dancing, singing Santa at Canadian Tire, to songs being ground out, like **All I Want For Christmas Is You-u-u-u! Ba-a-by!** you have to admit; the message gets blasted out that God showed up and forever split history in half.

-And what happened then is **still** powerfully at work in our world. And it's happening under our noses. But we **do** have to decide if we want to be a part of it or not.

## II. BUT... YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

A. Anyone here ever prayed a, **Please, God...show up!** Prayer? How many of you ever prayed this before a final exam—or deadline before a paper was due. “Oh God, magically insert information into my brain that I haven’t studied!” Most of us ask God to show up at some point in life. Even atheists do...occasionally. It's like a gasp for air, a scream for help, a 911 call. We don't necessarily want **God**, as such; we just want **help**. Like maybe He could send one of his little helpers, an angel, a cherub...money.

1. As I mentioned above, people—the Jewish people in particular...were praying those kinds of prayers back when God actually showed up...in Jesus. When it happened, it seemed totally normal to those who were watching it all come down—and totally **stressful** to those who were involved. Particularly Joseph and Mary.

-See if you can tune into the stress in this brief account from an ancient writer named Matthew:

**This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.**

**As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.**

**“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:**

**“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”**

**When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25 NLT).**

a. To recap from last week, Mary, at best estimate, was about 13 or 14 years old. She's poor—and her only hope for the future is marrying a good man. Fortunately, she's got that all lined up in Joseph. Then an angel shows up. And that day her life was changed in a way that jeopardized her reputation and her entire future.

-Just like the prophecy said, she will be the first pregnant virgin ever. That's an amazing thing, but everyone **else** will see here as pregnant and unmarried. In that culture—just like many Middle Eastern cultures today—that meant ostracism—and maybe death. And yet she simply says, **“I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true (Luke 1:38 NLT.)”**

b. This passage tells us that Joseph was a **righteous** man. That was technical language in that culture for a person who was exceptionally careful about keeping the law of Moses. Joseph didn't eat unclean food, he didn't hang with loose women, and he didn't do carpentry on the Sabbath.

He had the kind of respectability that all the other people in his village wanted.

- c. Then **this** happens. Mary comes home from an extended visit with her cousin, Elizabeth, and even the loose fitting robes can't hide the bulge in her mid-section. Enter...Nazareth, population—400! Anyone here ever lived in a small town? There's not much news in places like that—so they make it up. Scandal—especially involving people who are fine upstanding citizens can keep gossip going for **years** in a little back-woods town! -And immediately, Joseph's well-ordered life was thrown into chaos. Mary told him 'God did it', but he didn't just fall off the turnip wagon. He knew how stuff like this happened. Put yourself in his position—and imagine the agony and tears—and the questions, "Why, God?" Then God shows up. Joseph has a dream, and he's told, "Marry Mary!" She's the girl you always thought she was; in fact, the baby she's carrying has been conceived by the Holy Spirit."
- d. Then the words of prophecy quoted from Isaiah and applied to Jesus—this baby Mary's carrying: **"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.' Matthew 1:23 NLT**
- Immanuel.** God with us. **God** with us. God with **US!** Think about it for just a minute. God was literally **with** Joseph and Mary in an utterly astounding way. And yet, surrounding the whole thing is the scent of scandal. Him **being** there actually made life *more* complicated and messy and dangerous. My personal thought it that Mary didn't **have** to go with him to Bethlehem for the census. As heavy with child as she was—**anything** was better than staying in Nazareth alone with all the gossips!
2. I wonder what having God the Son as your baby was like? I mean, was He the dream child who smiled and asked to be fed; who from a week old and onward excused himself from the room when he had to relieve himself? They patted his back, but he never actually had to burp? Was he the star performer, high achiever—every parent's dream child?

-I beg to differ with the words from ***Away In A Manger***, "...no crying he makes." From everything I know and understand about "God with us"—I think there were times when He screamed his head off. I think he was a very developmentally normal baby and little boy. I think he got dirty, needed potty trained, played with toys, tripped and cut his knees.

-Max Lucado says that the story of Jesus in his early years is like a fence with knotholes in it. All you get is a peak. From the peaks I've had, I honestly don't think Mary and Joseph really knew who they were raising in those early years. There's a story about him getting left in Jerusalem for 3 days while they searched frantically. Mary, like every good Mom, chewed him out when they finally found him.

3. Read the narratives of Jesus' life, and you realize that God really did come in disguise. We pled, "God, **please** show up! Please come. **Please!**" He did—and most people never recognized him; even his own family. People in his home town speculated that he was illegitimate—nobody special. The book of John tells us that his brothers didn't believe in him in the early part of this ministry.

-And get this! Mark writes: **One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said (Mark 3:20-21 NLT).**

-Jesus sweat, Jesus cried. Jesus was not magically transported—he had to walk and ride in boats. He took baths, ate, drank wine, combed his hair. Jesus got hungry and tired and frustrated. In becoming a human, he risked that he would be seen as **just** a man—ala Dan Brown's claim that Jesus was an amazing man who had huge influence—but no more.

4. At the start of the service, you heard the 1995 song by Joan Osbourne, ***What if God was one of us...?*** So, let me answer the question: "Joan, God **did** become one of us!" Why? well, because we needed Him desperately. If He had wanted to redeem the whales, He would've become a whale. But he wanted to redeem humans—just like me—just like you—so He became human. And I'm **so** glad He did!

B. And that has power—you know, the fact that Jesus was born as a tiny baby, forced through the birth canal into this world of kid brothers, imperfect parents, bullies, pain, sweat, smells, hunger and hard work. **Huge** power and significance. As God, He really is **with** us. He's in this **with** us.

1. Some of you here have been through horrible things in your life, whether it's abuse in your home or betrayal, or financial loss, or the loss of a child, or being humiliated and bullied in school—I mean, there are terrible things that go on in our world because of the reign of sin.

- It's pretty hard for a person with four healthy children to comfort a couple struggling with infertility; it's pretty hard for someone who was the star of the show in school to comfort someone who **always** stood on the outside, looking in. The most powerful thing someone can say to you is, "I know **exactly** what that feels like; I've been there."

2. We can never wail at God, "But You don't understand what this feels like...!" He does. Poverty—hungry at night because there's not enough to eat? He knows. He knows what it's like to have your Dad die too young, He knows what it's like to be so exhausted and pulled in a thousand directions it's driving you crazy. He knows what it's like to be afraid, to be rejected, to suffer excruciating pain, to be misunderstood and betrayed, to lose a friend to disease. He knows.

3. Something else. It's clear that Jesus, as God, had people sin against **him**, but was sinless. Anyone here ever sinned in your life; or at least seriously **considered** it? Everyone. My greatest pain hasn't come from others sinning against me; it's been the shame and humiliation and regret I've felt because of my **own** sin and failure. The regret. The **how could I have been so stupid and blind!**

-So how does Someone who's perfect relate to **that!** Tell me, why is a courageous man like Jesus crying, sweating blood, and begging the Father to be spared the night before He died? Think the other prisoners facing execution the next day were doing that? I don't think Jesus' agony was over the thought of physical suffering.

-The Bible tells us that when he hung on the cross, he carried, in a soul that had never sinned, the full weight of all the sins ever committed. Imagine carrying, for a single day, the guilt of a pedophile who has spent his life raping innocent children, then murdering them and throwing them away like trash? Imagine the guilt of

every participation in the horror of an Auschwitz; of someone who in a drunken rage has killed a spouse, or prostituted a child to get more drugs? He carried **all** of that—and He carried all my guilt, shame, regret and self-loathing—and yours, too. He **knows!**

- C. We live in a world that places a **lot** of emphasis on the external. How we look, the blemishes we have or don't have—fat, cellulite, hair—or no hair, our height, shape, eyes—for us, all this stuff is a big deal. I don't know—and don't **want** to know how much we spend on it.
- Then there are clothes. What we drape this body with—should the stripes be vertical or horizontal? Heels, or no heels? What colors make me look slimmer? Do I look cool or hip—and do I care? Do people look at me and think, “Wow! Now **there's** a person who's well put together!
  - And then there's the other stuff; the context; the cars we drive, the home we live in, the friends we hang with; the invitations we accept—or don't accept. Do our kids make us look better...or worse?
1. Now, given where we live and how we live, I want to ask you to just be internally vulnerable for just a minute. What's the stripped down version of you like? You know, without all your glitter and shine. No buff; no wax job.
    - Jesus laid aside, not surface stuff—but everything that would instantly identify Him as God—born to extremely poor parents, in the backwoods bean-eater **hick** part of Israel. He wasn't a professional—he was a construction worker for most of his life. And he came to identify with us—because, see, everything else would create a barrier, and He didn't want barriers.
  2. Can you just be your stripped down version of you—with God? Cause, you see, that's how **He** knows you. And it's only in being stripped down, honest, transparent before Him that you can **really** do business with Him. To be honest, all the other stuff we spackle the cracks with and fill the gaps with and drape over us or stack around us isn't **bad**, it's just façade. Veneer. And when we get real with God and find we're accepted through Jesus, we can be honest and transparent with others.
    - Have you ever thought, “Am I comfortable in being with others without all my trappings; all the stuff that makes me look beautiful, intelligent, successful—worthy of their attention?”
    - If we are going to follow in Jesus' steps, I think it increasingly means to see all the impression management stuff in our lives for what it is. Stuff. Stuff that we use a little fort to protect us. I understand that we can't—and shouldn't be—emotional flashers. But I think we can strip away some of the insulation and still be safe. What do you think?

### III. GOD IS SO WITH YOU!

- A. I mentioned guests at the beginning. At Christmas, more than any other time, we have guests—and we are tempted to do the Martha Stewart thing—or play a scene out of **Christmas Vacation**. It can be fun, if the people in your home aren't read to kill each other before it's over. You know, all the napkins all folded in the shape of little Santa's, and little gingerbread name plates, and gourmet chestnut stuffing, and mashed, brown-sugared yams with a marshmallow Frosty The Snowman on a bed of pecans. Just out of pure interest—are there any Martha Stewart Christmas people here? Yea Martha!
- How many of you would say that when the family comes to visit on holidays it's sort of a **Pepto-Bismol** moment?

1. I can guarantee you that if Jesus visited your house, you wouldn't feel like that. He was so loving and forgiving and full of kindness and grace—you'd wish he could stay forever. I know that's what I'd want—even though my home, probably like yours, has its share of blow-ups and screw-ups.
  - a. Jesus made a curious comment right before He died and ascended to the Father. As his disciples began to really understand completely what was going to happen, they got more and more weighed down. They thought Jesus being with them was a permanent deal, because of Who He was. Now he was saying. "Nope. Gotta go!" Then this comment: **But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (or Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7 TNIV).**
  - b. Why would he say that? Well, think about it. He became a *man*. In doing so, He gave up his power to be omnipresent. If Jesus was in Jerusalem, he wasn't in Capernaum or Jericho or in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. -What he was saying is that by going to the Father, the Spirit—called in the NT, the ***Spirit of Jesus***—would be with everyone, all the time, and never leave. He would comfort; he would whisper truth, give direction, encourage, empower, shield hearts. Strange. By going, Jesus was ***extending his visit!***
2. This is my point. This same Jesus is with us through the power of the Spirit. Immanuel. God ***with*** us. God ***with*** me. God ***with*** you.
 

-This gets a little confusing sometimes. Especially for kids. Some friends of mine had a son who was quite scared of the dark. One night his mom asked him to go out on the front porch and get the broom for her. He told her he was too scared and began to whimper at even the ***thought*** of doing it. So, she sat him down and said, "Keith, you know what I've always told you—you don't have to be afraid, cause Jesus is with you wherever you go, ***even on a dark porch!***" Well, Keith felt ***much*** better. So he went boldly to the door, stuck his head out, and said, "Hey Jesus! Hand me the broom!"

  - a. The point is—and there is a point—you won't ***see*** Jesus. But through His Spirit, He is ***so*** there! ***SO*** there. He told his followers, "Whenever you gather in my Name—even if there's only 2 or 3 of you I'm *there!*"
  - b. He also said, "Know when you see someone in need and help them? You've helped ***me!*** Know when you say, "Oh ***God!*** I don't know what to do—give me wisdom!"—and nothing seems to happen? I've given you wisdom. I'm with you when feel lost in cubicleland; I'm there when everything being taught in your university class mocks my existence. I'm with you when you're having a blast with your friends. I'm with you when you're on a date, and afraid you'll give in to the sexual pressure. I'm with you every time you drive on the DVP—and when you ***can't*** drive because it's jammed.
  - c. Years ago, Randy Stonehill recorded a song—actually, Lori sang it a few months ago—***Gone Away***. It's about all these people who have come—and been on stage of this world, shone for a while, Matthew, Mark, Jimmy Dean, Cleopatra, Augustine, Martin Luther, Marilyn Monroe—gone away. Gone. Can't get them back, there's no way, cause they're gone. Gone away. Just can't get them back.

-But not Jesus. Savior. Friend. Living now, and living then. You've **come to stay!** Lewis Smedes is the author of the best book on forgiveness I've ever read. I heard this 70-something man give this message on how Jesus came from upstairs—downstairs. And he brought his suitcase and his toothbrush and his jammies—cause He **came to STAY!**

3. I'm telling you—the deeper you can bury that truth into your heart and into the dark scary places of your life, the better. Jesus came as a human. He **knows** what it's like to live on this planet with all it throws at you.

-And He's with you—not as a fellow human to stroke your forehead and calm you down—but with all the power and authority of God to work in others, work outside you, and work inside you. There's not any space around you where God won't work, where He can't work, and where He's not **already** at work.

-There's something else you need to know. God changes whatever he touches. The Christmas story is this beautiful, amazing story that we never get tired of telling. Kids act it out every year—and it's cute, with bathrobes, tin foil wings—and, of course, **some kid** has to play the donkey!

-But the **real** story is quite pathetic. If it happened in our culture, we'd call in children and youth services. There was nothing pretty or quaint or poetic about the mess Mary and Joseph found themselves in having their first baby. But the picture has been touched by God and forever changed into something beautiful. The angel was right—nothing is impossible with God.

-And at the end of Jesus' life, it looks like the dream of a Messiah, a Savior has been completely crushed. Pried off the cross. Dead. It even appears that the Father has forsaken him.

-But three days later, after God moved the rock to show that his grave was empty—that transformation happened all over again. The cross went from being this humiliating sign of oppression and execution to a symbol of hope and life we hang around our necks. God changes whatever He touches. Again, the angel was right; nothing is impossible with God.

- B. As I write, there are a number of places in my life—and the lives of people I love--where I cry almost daily, God, **please show up!** And I'll you have something like that going on, don't you. Let me tell you a few things I've learned.

1. First, I've learned that God is **already there**—that just because I don't see Him, or see a miracle a day, or see everything changing before my eyes, He **is** at work. -Interesting, isn't it, that in a story like Jesus' birth studded with amazing signs and angels—the angels didn't tell their parents, or the town that God was behind everything. When there was no room in the Inn, he didn't make a Hilton appear on north end of town.

2. And that brings me to the next thought. Allowing God to use your life sometimes gets messy and hard. Conventional wisdom would say, ““God, do you know how hard it is for a girl who's 9 months pregnant to travel 70 miles by foot and by donkey? Elijah got the flaming chariot! Shoot, you've made donkey's talk! Why couldn't you make this one **fly?!?**”

-“God, you know how hard Joseph has worked to live out his reputation as a righteous man. Couldn't do something to help him preserve it? I mean, this is your own Son—couldn't you spare him some scandal?”

-And the truth is—God intervenes, He hears, He's with us—but **He** chooses what He's going to do and how. Usually more quietly and slowly than we want. **Why?**

- I don't have any idea. Except that maybe what He's doing *inside* us is more important than rescuing us. Maybe He's preparing us for the future? I try to prepare for the future by running and doing push-ups and sit-ups. I don't *like* them. I don't *feel* like doing them—but I do prefer them to the alternative. -I'd have to admit that the times I've wanted most to get rescued from—and been a little ticked off at God that He didn't follow *my* plan—have been the times I've grown most. Go figure! And when it was all done, I was *okay. I really was!*
3. I have one final thought. And this is maybe the most important one. God sent his Son, Immanuel, God With Us. That is incredibly comforting—powerful. I'm never alone! So...here's the deal. Am *I* with **God**? Am I interruptible? That's maybe one of the most amazing things we see in this story. Everyone God used and worked with was *interruptible*.
- a. An angel shows up, surprises Mary—and his message is, "Know the wedding you've been planning? God is about to do something that will interrupt your life—and your wedding. Are you up for it?" And Mary's response, as you know, was; "I'm *your* servant—you do with me whatever you want—*whatever it costs.*"  
-As tough as it was, you *never* find Mary whining, complaining, "God, you never told me it would be *this* hard!" She must've been something else! Joseph? His life got interrupted. He takes a deep breath—and does *exactly* what God asked him to do. Did you ever notice that Mary's parents and Joseph's parents are *never* mentioned? Makes you wonder if they were interruptible.
- b. If you watch Jesus' life carefully, that's the one thing you see about Him. God shows up for a limited amount of time on this planet—and constantly gets interrupted. And you never hear him saying, "Don't you know who I am—and all I have to do here? Man—I need an administrative assistant to protect my time!"  
-Nope! Kids interrupt them—he welcomes them. A woman with an embarrassing menstrual condition. A little curious short guy, a Roman soldier with a sick slave. A blind man. A guy with a demon-possessed child. He was amazingly interruptible.
4. The question I would ask you is this—are you interruptible—or is your life so planned out that you really don't even look up that much, for fear that God might wreck the day? Like, could He ask you to do something—and you'd be right there. You'd drop what it is your doing, set aside your plan, your checklist—all the busyness, and say, "God—you just disrupt my plans *any time you want*. Make my life as messy as you have to—because to the core of my being I believe that not only are your plans and thoughts NOT my plans and thoughts—your ways and thoughts are infinitely higher and better! And I want *you* more than I want an orderly, predictable, safe life. I want you—I *need* you to interrupt me with your plans. I don't just want you to be with me—*I want you to be with You!*"
5. One more important thought. Not only is God with you, He is *for* you. **So** for you. He is for your emotional and spiritual health. He's for the success of all the relationships in your life. He's with you—and for you in your life having meaning and hope and significance. The question is not if this is *true*—the question is—do you believe it?

#### IV. CLOSING: GOD WILL NOT 'TAG ALONG'

- A. I need to make something really clear as we close this morning. **God-with-us** does not mean that God is like a pesky little brother or sister--tagging along when you'd rather he go away. God gives distance to those who want distance, but He gives Himself to those who want to be with Him and cooperate.
- B. This morning there's a take home. You got a **Post-It** note when you came in. I want you to think, where do you most need to put that note to remind yourself, "God is with me **right here!**" Let me give you some suggestions:

\*You could put it on your dashboard

\*You could put it on the picture of someone you love—who's on a tangent right now

\*You could put it on a doctor's diagnosis, or on a credit card, or on your computer screen

\*You could put it on your refrigerator door; you could put it anywhere you are tempted to fall or fail or doubt.

\*Maybe you need to put it on the inside of your glasses, or on a bottle of medicine, or your cellphone or organizer.

Too bad we can't put those things on our hearts, eh? Whatever you do, don't forget--never **ever** forget, God is **with** you--and God is **for** you.