

# CROSS

# Connection



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Of all the names for Jesus listed in the Bible, the one that means the most to me this time of year is Emmanuel. Emmanuel: God with us. GOD with us. God WITH us. God with US. No matter where you choose to place the emphasis, something important and infinitely precious is being communicated.

That God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth would choose to make himself so vulnerable as to come into our violent, disrespectful, destructive world as a baby—to be with us? If that doesn't stop you in your tracks: you're not paying attention. That God would become incarnate—literally to become fleshed—to share this world with us, not so that he could then say, "Yeah, I know. Life can really be the pits. This one time? One of my best friends totally stabbed me in the back..." But rather so that he could say, "I will deliver you from this. I will take on this brokenness, and I will give you my wholeness. I will take on your despair, and give you my hope. I will take on the powers of darkness that surround you, so that you, beloved one, can walk in the light." What do we do with love like that?

It turns out: it's too much. It's too much to bear, being loved so completely. It makes it hard to breathe. So we bring trees into our houses, wrap them in lights, tell our children stories about a fat guy and chimneys and reindeer. We give one another gifts and sing songs about the Baby Jesus, and we allow this love to only exist at the peripheries of our holiday because if it gets too close: then all is lost. All is lost. All our illusions of control and competence and free will and good choices and all of the rest of it will be taken away by a God-baby who comes with no other goal than to love us, in spite of ourselves. This sweet Babe of Bethlehem, with ears like the swirled interiors of seashells and hands like stars will hear us call for his blood, and his death. Those hands will be pierced for our sake, because we don't know how to react to a love without limits and without conditions. We will kill him because he dares become what we are, and love us anyway. He knows it. We know it.

And he comes anyway.

This is truly what Emmanuel means. An unstoppable drive to be with the ones He loves, no matter what. To know that we will betray him, replace him, deny him, ignore him, compartmentalize him, weaponize him, hate him—and still he comes. Relentlessly pursuing us with love that it is painful to contemplate. *What wondrous love is this, o my soul, o my soul?*

It is the love of Christ. Given in water, bread, and wine. Relentlessly pursuing those who are his own, no matter what. Merry Christmas, beloved ones. Emmanuel is with us.

+Bishop Kristen

