

First Sunday after Christmas Day, December 31, 2023

## Scripture Reading: Luke 2:22-40

*Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out. —Max Lucado*

One of the most comforting and reassuring verses in the Bible is not found in Psalm 23, but in Matthew 1. There we read: “‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us’” (v. 23).

As we peer today into the year that looms before us, it is a comfort to know that in the baby of the manger, whose birth we celebrated only a few days ago, is the Savior who is still with us. What’s more, he has promised never to leave us (see Matthew 28:20). God in the person of Jesus Christ is always with us whatever our condition, whatever our need.

Lutheran Bishop Stephen Bouman explains. He tells of standing behind an altar in a crypt of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth in the Holy Land, the place where Mary heard that she was going to have a baby. He saw some Latin words carved into the altar, *Verbum caro factum est*, “The Word was made flesh.”

But then he noticed that there was one other little word in Latin. That word *hic*, meaning “here.” *Verbum caro HIC factum est*. “The Word was made flesh here.”

Probably whoever authorized that inscription meant for it to refer to that specific location, but the word hints at a larger truth.

In reality, the Incarnation means God became flesh here on earth, for all of us. The Incarnation means that we can speak of the *hicness* of God, the nearness of God. Incarnation means that God walks with us on earth, and that if we are saved anywhere, it is right here on earth, right now in the here and now. God is involved in the minutiae and details of my life.

I find that comforting, and I find that reassuring.

How about you?

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, be with me in 2024 and now and forevermore. In your name. Amen.*

*Happy New Year Blessings!  
Lisa & Pastor Ben Motz  
Steven, Sara, & Ethan*

**Daily Bible Readings**

- Sunday:** Ecclesiastes 11
- Monday:** Ecclesiastes 12
- Tuesday:** Song of Solomon 4-5
- Wednesday:** Song of Solomon 6
- Thursday:** Song of Solomon 7
- Friday:** Song of Solomon 8

*Congratulations!  
You have completed reading  
through the Bible in one year!*

**VERSE TO REMEMBER**

*Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come.*

—Ecclesiastes 12:1

**Jumbled Words: The Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:17-49 is a collection of sayings spoken by Jesus that encapsulate his moral teachings. Matthew’s version begins with what are called The Beatitudes—perhaps one of the most widely quoted sections of the gospels.

Test your vocabulary! All eight words below are taken from Matthew 5. Using the clues provided, and the jumbled letters, write the word in the spaces provided. The first one is done for you.

1. **Clue:** to be made happy

B L E S S E D

LBSE DSE

2. **Clue:** severely harass

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EPUCRTSEE

3. **Clue:** commits atrocities

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VOREIEDL

4. **Clue:** foretellers of events

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PTSHPORE

5. **Clue:** the quality of having virtue

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ESSUERGONTHSI

6. **Clue :** old

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CITENAN

7. **Clue:** Someone we love

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EONRBHGI

8. **Clue:** celestial

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EAELYVHN



**Answers:**  
 1. blessed; 2. persecute;  
 3. evildoer; 4. prophets;  
 5. righteousness;  
 6. ancient; 7. neighbor;  
 8. heavenly.