

## Christmas Presence

Immanuel - God With Us

December 7-9

### Introduction

#### [Tyco RC “Tantrum” Video]

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, this commercial aired everyday during afterschool specials and Saturday morning cartoons. It became every boy’s mission to wield the power of the “Tantrum” on Christmas day and Tyco’s message to parents was loud and clear — Either your kid gets a “Tantrum” for Christmas or you will. And the parents rolled right over. There were three other boys my age living on my street and that Christmas all four of us burst out of our homes clutching the exact same gift — the “Tantrum”. And the realization that all four of us had the exact same car was almost too much for our brains to handle. We thought one “Tantrum” was awesome but now there were four.

Unfortunately the ecstasy was short-lived because we soon discovered a small design flaw — your remote control didn’t just control your “Tantrum” it controlled all “Tantrums”. Chaos ensued as all four cars spun out of control mixing signals from four different remotes. Instead of racing and flipping it was a demolition derby. Sadly our parents ended up getting a tantrum on Christmas after all.

Ironically, the only way we could play with our car was alone. So the “ultimate gift” got shelved and we all went back to playing kickball.

Looking back, I don’t remember much about the toy, but I do remember the laughter, the excitement, and the way we’d all eventually ditch the cars just to *be together*. Funny, isn’t it? The best gifts weren’t under the tree; they were the people around it.

Here’s the thing: Christmas has this way of bringing joy and reminding us of who’s there—but it can also remind us of who isn’t. For every seat filled at the table, there’s sometimes an empty chair—a reminder of loss, distance, or longing. That’s why the greatest gift of Christmas is not a present under the tree but the presence of the ones we love most. And the best gift of all is the Presence of Jesus, who steps into our longing, fills the emptiness, and gives us new life.

Throughout this series we’re going to unwrap the matchless gifts found in Jesus.

### The Stump

But the story of the first Christmas doesn’t begin with festive lights, joyful carols, or a warm holiday setting. Instead, it starts 700 years earlier, with a prophet named Isaiah foretelling the coming of Jesus—not with fanfare, but with a curious and unexpected image.

<sup>1</sup> *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

<sup>2</sup>

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—*

<sup>3</sup>

*and he will delight in the fear of the Lord,” (Isaiah 11:1-3).*

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would come in the power of the Holy Spirit—but notice how He is described: a shoot emerging from a stump. Jesse was the father of David, the shepherd boy who became Israel's greatest king.

Under King David's rule, Israel flourished. It was like a tree planted by streams of water—its branches reaching far and wide, its leaves green, and its fruit abundant. Israel stood tall, a proud and mighty nation blessed by God.

But after David, things began to change. Slowly, Israel's heart turned away from God. They started chasing after foreign idols and ignoring the voices of God's prophets. The tree that once flourished began to wither. The nation split in two, and in time, their enemies came to conquer. First, they were marched off into exile. Later, they were crushed under the weight of one oppressive empire after another.

By the time of Jesus, roughly 1,000 years after David's reign, Israel was no longer the mighty tree it had been. Now it was a stump—cut down, lifeless, and buried under the shadow of the Roman Empire.

This is how the Christmas story begins. And very early in the story we are introduced to a couple who are in a bit of a stump themselves. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. This beautiful couple was probably the talk of their little town — Nazareth. They envisioned a bright and fruitful life together, growing a family whose roots would grow deep and would stand tall for generations to come. But just as their dreams are about to come true their tree is toppled as Mary is found to be with child before the wedding and Joseph is not the father. All that seems left of their dreams is a lifeless stump.

So when the Christmas story begins, Israel is little more than a stump. Mary and Joseph are stumped. How about you? Have you ever been in a season where everything you hoped for had been chopped down?

All of us face seasons of life where we just feel stumped. Maybe you poured your heart and soul into a job and the people you worked with only to find it ripped away. Maybe it was a relationship that you thought would last forever but is now fractured and distant. Maybe you've recently gone through a disappointment or loss that has left you reeling, looking for your footing. Or maybe it was a calling, a ministry, or something in which you found purpose. Perhaps there was a season where things were fruitful and you were experiencing tremendous growth but now things feel lifeless and stagnant. All of us have been stumped at one point or another. But here's the amazing thing about the Christmas story — the stump is not the end of the story, it's the beginning! The world looks at a stump and sees the end of the story but God looks at the stump and sees the beginning of His story! The world looks at a stump and sees a dead end, God looks at a stump and sees a launching pad! God is in the business of bringing new life out of dead stumps. So the first thing the story of Christmas teaches us is,

## **1. WHERE YOU SEE AN END, GOD SEES A BEGINNING.**

God is able to bring new life from the stumps in our life and when that shoot begins to grow it isn't about your survival, it's the beginning of revival!

How many of you believe that God is able to grow a shoot from your stump? How many of you are believing for God to bring new life to barren spaces?

## **The Shoot**

<sup>1</sup> *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit,” (Isaiah 11:1).*

God is able to bring a shoot from our stumps. But here's the thing about a shoot—it doesn't just appear out of nowhere. It springs up from roots that are still alive, hidden beneath the surface. Roots are what remain after the tree has been cut down, and roots are what God uses to bring new life. So the second thing the story of Christmas teaches us is,

## **2. TO GROW A SHOOT, YOU NEED TO ROOT.**

This is where faithfulness comes in. God isn't looking for the tallest trees or the greenest branches—He's looking for deep roots. He's looking for people who, even in seasons of loss and disappointment, remain faithful and grounded in Him.

Think about Mary and Joseph. Even in their own “stump” moment, they remained rooted. They were faithful to God in a time when everything seemed to be falling apart. They didn't let fear uproot them. They trusted, obeyed, and stayed connected to the promises of God.

<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*

<sup>29</sup> *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

<sup>34</sup> *“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”*

<sup>35</sup> *The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.”*

<sup>38</sup> *“I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her,” (Luke 1:26-38).*

On the surface, everyone in Mary's life probably saw a stump. Public disgrace and humiliation, a marriage in shambles. But God was looking at what was beneath the surface. When the world saw a stump, God saw a humble servant who was rooted in her commitment. He saw a woman of radical faith who dared to believe and obey even though it didn't make sense. How about us? Do we continue to stay rooted even in our stump seasons? Do we remain faithful in hidden places when no one is watching?

<sup>7</sup> *“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord  
and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.*

<sup>8</sup> *They are like trees planted along a riverbank,  
with roots that reach deep into the water. (Jeremiah 17:7-8a).*

In your stump seasons I pray that you would stay rooted. God brings the shoot when we root. There were many in the Christmas story who remained rooted in faith despite being stumped. Besides Mary there was Joseph who remained faithful to her despite the potential humiliation and social stigma, there was also Mary's cousin Elizabeth who continued to stay rooted despite years of being without child, there was Simeon who believed for God to fulfill His promise to Israel even when all hope seemed lost, and others as well whom God used to bring about His shoot because He saw their roots.

We live in a day where people are so fixated on what's visible above the surface. We want our branches and leaves to look good. Deep roots grow in the dark where nobody can see them. They are what will remain when the storms of life blow and your life feels like it's been reduced to a stump. As long as your roots are strong and deep there will always be hope for new beginnings. Don't focus so much on what is visible above the surface and what others see that you neglect the unseen — staying connected to God's Word, spending time in His Presence, and being faithful to fellowship. This is how we choose faith over fear because our roots are deep and we know God can always produce a shoot where He finds a root.

Today we've seen how the story of Christmas began with a stump. Stumps can feel like the end of the story but for God it can be the beginning of something brand new. We also saw that for God to produce a shoot He's looking for people who root. Mary and Joseph were chosen to take part in God's plan of revival because, despite being in a stump, they remained faithfully rooted in Him. And finally, as we close, the story of Christmas reminds us to,

### **3. EMBRACE THE JOURNEY FROM SHOOT TO FRUIT.**

<sup>1</sup> *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from His roots a Branch will bear fruit," (Isaiah 11:1).*

Shoots are small, fragile, and unimpressive. They don't immediately resemble the towering tree they will one day become. But every great tree starts as a humble shoot, and the journey from shoot to fruit takes time, patience, and care.

Think about Jesus. He came into the world not as a conquering king but as a vulnerable baby, born in a manger. His arrival wasn't heralded by parades or celebrated by nations but announced to shepherds in the quiet of night. Yet that humble beginning — that tiny shoot carried the potential to change the world forever.

This is how God often works—He starts small. He brings revival not through flashy displays but through seeds of faith planted in hidden places, nurtured over time. Jesus said it's like a tiny mustard seed that grows into the largest tree over time. Or it's like an ounce of yeast that eventually takes over the entire batch of dough. Or it is the tiny stone that grows into a mountain. Through the Prophet Micah the Lord spoke, DEC

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for Me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times," (Micah 5:2).*

Just like a shoot doesn't bear fruit overnight, God's plans often take time to unfold. The Bible says in Zechariah that we are not to despise small beginnings.

So here's the challenge for us — Will we trust Him in the process? Will we nurture the small beginnings, stay faithful in the in-between, and not grow weary in doing good?

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up," (Galatians 6:9).*

You and I are living in the 'instant' era. We want everything instant, on-demand, same-day. But the best things in life, the most fruitful things in life are not instant. Character takes time to grow, wisdom takes time to learn, intimacy takes time to develop.

Mary and Joseph embraced the journey. They didn't despise the smallness of the manger or the uncertainty of raising the Messiah as ordinary parents. They trusted God to bring fruit in His time, through their faithfulness. And God did—because of their obedience, the world received the greatest gift it's ever known.

So, what about you? Maybe the "shoot" in your life feels small or fragile right now. Maybe it's a new beginning, a renewed calling, or a fresh work of God that you're just starting to see. Don't despise it. Nurture it. Trust that God will bring fruit in His time.

God's story is one of redemption, growth, and fulfillment. What begins as a shoot will grow into a branch, and the branch will bear fruit—fruit that will last. This Christmas season, may we embrace the humble beginnings, stay faithful in the process, and trust God to turn our stumps into stories of hope and revival.

As we close, let me leave you with this: Where you see a stump, God sees the start of something new. Where you root yourself in Him, He brings the shoot. And as you nurture that shoot with faith and obedience, He promises to bring fruit in His time. Let's embrace the journey and trust the One who is faithful to finish the work He starts.

### **Discussion Question:**

1. STUMP: Have you experienced a time in your life when everything you hoped for seemed to be cut down, like the "stump" of Jesse? How did you see God working to bring new beginnings from that situation?
2. ROOT TO SHOOT: Mary and Joseph remained rooted in their faith despite fear, uncertainty, and public scrutiny. What practices or disciplines help you stay rooted in God during challenging or barren seasons?
3. SHOOT TO FRUIT: God often starts with something small and fragile, like a shoot, to bring about transformation. How can we cultivate patience and trust in God's process when the fruit of His promises is not yet visible?