Reflection by Craig Carr - Boulder, USA

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”  Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)

I can remember being scared to death of thunderstorms. As a young child living in the upper Midwest, the clouds would roll in with flashes of lightning and clashes of thunder as tremors of fear and dread filled my little heart. All it took to calm me down was the presence of my father, my dad; my ever-present hero in thunderous times. As he would take his place on the edge of my bed, the fears and anxieties would roll away like wisps of clouds even while the thunder boomed and the lightning flashed. His companionship and present company made everything all right.

Jesus, the One, enters our storm-tossed, helplessly lost world. From predicted prophecies to the angelic announcement, Immanuel became full-term, “…that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:22,23) Immanuel, God with us in real, human form. Our Creator, the King of kings and Lord of lords (can I get a chorus of Hallelujahs?) Jesus came to this earth to be with us.
My life is often filled with doubt, uncertainty, fear, and disappointment. These personal storms enter my life without forecast or invitation. But I had missed it for so many Christmas seasons, amid the angels and shepherds and songs concerning the Christ Child. The Christmas story is brimming with the message of “Fear not.” Check this out:

1. To a doubting preacher who had his storms of doubt and boredom silenced with the message was, “Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard.” (Luke 1:13)

2. To an excited, newly engaged teenager girl who thought she had her future all figured out, an angel tells her she’s “prego” as her mind races through the scary conversations in her near future; but the angel calms her thundery thoughts with, “Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30)

3. To a normally brave brood of common shepherds, suddenly scared out of their wits by the lightning-bright angel band, their immediate message was: “Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10,11)

4. To a widowed father who’d risked and found love again—only to be disappointed by the news of a pregnant fiancé—we hear the assurance of God’s plan: “Joseph, son of David, fear not to take you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20,21)

Life is full of thunderstorms that flash in and flood our everyday reality with emotional whirlwinds, physical twisters, spiritual tempests, and relationship squalls of every kind. But no matter the stormy circumstance in which I may find myself, I’ve been given many promises that Jesus is with me. For Jesus is Immanuel—God with us—through anything and everything life may heave at us. This offers me the assurance that Jesus is by my side, my doubt dissipates, my uncertainties unwind, my fears are quieted, and my disappointments blossom in hope. This is the power of the Christmas story, Isaiah’s message of, “Fear not, for I am with you.” Even when the thunderings and flashes are in their full strength, it is my prayers that we are constantly aware of the companionship of our Immanuel—Jesus—God with us.

To play on the words of a popular carol, “The weather outside is frightful, but inside it’s so delightful; so since we have One place to go, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!”
Recalibrate

1) In the spirit of the Christmas tale, “Scrooge,” what fears of “Christmas past or present” do you need to give over to the One? How might you be reminded of God’s Immanuel presence in your life?

2) To Jesus, Immanuel—God With Us, what anxieties of “Christmas future” will you relinquish to Him? What habits or behaviors might help you sustain a daily “God With Us” experience in your life?