My youngest sister had her baby the first week of December and all of the rest of us sisters (there are four in all), flew out to be with her for a few days. There wasn’t a lot to do—make sure she had all that she needed nearby, play with her oldest son, get food, and take turns holding the baby.

At Christmastime, getting to love on a tiny baby has special poignancy. Our God became a tiny baby. It was a huge risk. I think about how much effort our family spent on making sure my sister’s new baby didn’t get sick—those little ones are so vulnerable. God chose to become dependent on humans in so many ways, to so clearly identify with the human race—no wonder Paul called the whole Incarnation “foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). I am touched by how much “God with us” means that God had to trust people to care for His needs and teach Him the basics of life.

This means that He has a tenderness for all the ordinariness of human life. Just as all of us, at the time of our birth, had someone who cared for our sanitation, our food intake, watched our breath to make sure we were comfortable and healthy—all of that our God also had.

This work, taking care of tiny humans and growing them up, taking care of big humans, giving dignity to old age and care for the body, is all sacred. “God with us” adds value to
the very physicality of humanity and not just our accomplishments, the work that we do. Just being enfleshed ourselves, being babies, means that we have a connection to God Incarnate, the Babe in the manger.

This trip to see my sister and new niece also reminded me of why “God with us” is such a comfort. Because while we couldn’t really do anything to relieve my sister of the challenges of childbirth, she felt loved and valued just because we were there. People sometimes say how important it was to them that someone was “there for me.” And this might be metaphorical, but first and foremost it is literal—being present for someone in their time of need means coming near them and sitting by them and listening to them and taking your time to be where they are.

So when God became flesh, He was “there for us.” And He still is. He “took time,” so to speak, out of His schedule, His bigger agenda, and He joined our little planet, joined a family, like we all have, and went about His work in a little corner of the world, in the way we all have to. He is God with Us. And the universe was never the same.

Recalibrate

1) When have you been blessed by the presence of God through someone else?

2) In what situations do you most often become aware of “God with us,” Immanuel’s presence in your life?

3) What makes it hard for you to be present in the lives of other people?