



December
12 & 13

ARRIVAL

Be Present

John Fuller,
Senior Pastor

Introduction

Paula Cooper served twenty-seven years in an Indiana prison for stabbing elderly Ruth Pelke in a botched teenaged robbery. Over that time, Cooper aged quickly and grew weary of life behind bars, passing the days by reading and pacing the floor of her death row cell. Two million people signed a petition for her release, and Pope John Paul II appealed to Indiana's governor for a pardon, yet none of this was enough to free her. That was, until the day an unlikely advocate stepped forward to claim Paula's freedom. Mrs. Pelke's grandson, Bill, announced he had forgiven Paula for her crime years earlier, and he was sure Grandma Ruth would have done the same. Through this outreach of love, Paula was eventually released from prison, her captivity over and a new life ahead. Much like Paula, humankind waited centuries for a forgiving Savior to deliver them from bondage. Matthew reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be called Immanuel, meaning "God with us," [Matthew 1:22-23]. Jesus' presence then, and now, means our waiting is over for God's peace, love and joy.

Discussion

Read Matthew 1:18-25 and discuss the following questions.

1. Recent events in France and in California have raised public fears of terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. How does Jesus' presence counteract these fears in our lives? What should we do if we find ourselves mired in fear?
2. The world's largest car company recently admitted its employees were pressured into a "culture of rule-breaking" in the Dieselgate scandal. Considering this, how should Jesus' presence in our lives influence our behavior in the workplace, such that we'll do the right thing even under pressure? Can you cite an instance where you were under pressure to bend the rules? How did you respond?
3. Imagine that you are at a holiday get together with family when your least-favorite relative arrives on the scene. He is loud, obnoxious and has had one too many drinks. Steve starts his monologue with a variety of dirty jokes and then proceeds to dish out the insults, including a nasty one aimed at you. The crowd goes silent awaiting your response. Considering Jesus is with you at that moment, how are you going to respond?

Think About It

Charles Spurgeon, nineteenth century preacher, said, "Scarcely can you find a halting place in the march of life at which Jesus has not paused. From the gate of entrance even to the door which closes life's way, the footprints of Jesus may be traced. Were you in the cradle? He was there. Have you entered upon life's battle? Your Lord and Master did the same, and though He lived not to old age, yet through incessant toil and suffering, He bore the marred visage which attends a battered old age. Are you alone? So was He, in the wilderness and on the mountain's side, and in the garden's gloom. Do you mix in public society? So did He labor in the thickest crowds. Where can you find yourself, on the hilltop, or in the valley, on the land or on the sea, in the daylight or in darkness—where, I say, can you be without discovering that Jesus has been there before you?"

Do Something

Google an image of Jesus, and copy and paste it into your favorite photo with family or friends. Arrange it so Jesus is "one of the gang," and print it out. You can do this electronically, or if you prefer, make a collage with paper, scissors and tape. Place the image in a prominent spot – either physically or on your computer, tablet or phone – so you'll see it every day of the Christmas season. Each time that you look at it, consider the effect "God with us" is having on your thoughts, words and deeds. Share your experience with someone in your group or with a trusted friend.