

Gracious God, Giver of Life, You are coming to be with us.
You are coming even though our preparations for Christmas tend to be long on the trivial
and short on the profound;
You are coming even through all our moments of worry and fret about things that don't
matter very much.
You are coming anyway, and we are grateful.

We have told stories about your coming.
We have dreamed about your coming.
We wondered if you were coming...
We wondered if we would know you if you came.
We wondered if you were coming to be with *us*.
You whose name is *Emmanuel*, God with us.

We hoped that you might come in a blaze of glory.
Winning our hardest conflicts
Defeating our most subtle enemies
Conquering everything that keeps us from happiness.

We have wanted you to appear in our holy places, where we know how to look for you.
We summoned you up in beautiful table arrangements and careful rehearsal of our best
traditions.

But you who are God with us--
You come in your own way.

You come in the least expected way
In the least expected place
Through the least expected people.

You came through a pregnant young teenager far from home
A mother giving birth in a stable.

You came with a confused and conflicted husband.
An honorable man who was shocked by an unplanned pregnancy.

You came in a stable behind the inn.
A baby who cried his first breath among animals.

You came to an out-of-the-way place.
Bethlehem...where wars have *always* raged and life has never been perfect.

So this Christmas, we pray. Come again to all the places where we have stopped
expecting you to come:
Come to those people and places caught up in war.
Come to families who cannot trust that their children will be protected or safe.

Come to the ones who are ill, or coping with pain, or fearing the worst, and to those who worry for the future.

Come to those who are struggling in relationships, especially in this “family time”, when cracks are kept just below the surface.

Come to the ones who have no home, who are excluded, cold, struggling to keep hold of who they are.

And come to us. Bring us joy, the kind of joy that bubbles up from a deep well.

You came.

You keep coming.

And so once again, we pin all our hopes on you...

Because every time you come, we remember: Our God is with us.

And our hope is re-born, our joy is re-kindled.

Come Lord Jesus...come.