

With open arms

WHAT would it be like if God himself came to earth?

What if he were reared by a small-town, blue-collar family? What if he put himself into daily contact with ordinary men and women—with no-nonsense farmers and shrewd merchants? What if he rubbed elbows with soldiers and fishermen, noisy little kids and streetwise sinners?

What if he lived through the same growth phases you and I experience? The tears of infancy, the awkwardness of adolescence, the responsibilities of adulthood? What if he spoke profound words of wisdom and careful authors wrote them down? What if he performed mighty miracles and eyewitnesses recorded them for all to read?

Instead of having an easy time of it here on earth, what if he endured physical anguish, emotional rejection, social injustice, and spiritual agony? What if he died a violent, painful, humiliating death? And then came back to life again?

About 2,000 years ago, God did come to earth. An ancient prophet referred to him as “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” He was born to a virgin named Mary in the Middle-Eastern village of Bethlehem and reared by a carpenter named Joseph. At age 30 he gathered a group of disciples who heard him teach and witnessed his miracles—including his own resurrection from death.

John called Jesus “the Word” who “was God,” and the Word “became flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:1, 14). Later John described Jesus in

greater detail: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

Not at Arm’s Length

In the country church I attended as a boy, two large paintings hung on the front wall. One showed Jesus holding little children in his arms. The other showed a shepherd carrying a lamb in his arms. I loved those paintings, even though as a young boy I didn’t understand them.

Later I read how Jesus invited the little children to come to him, and he

Is God distant and unapproachable?

took them in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16). I read that the Lord “tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:11).

To illustrate the love of God, Jesus told about a shepherd who had 99 sheep safe in the pen, but he searched diligently for one sheep that was still missing. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, “he joyfully put it on his shoulders” and took it home (Luke 15:1-7). Some see God as aloof, distant, and unapproachable—keeping us at arm’s length. But according to Jesus, he’s like a shepherd who finds a

runaway sheep and then gives it a joyful piggyback ride back to the barn!

In another story Jesus told about a young man who squandered his life in wild living. Finally, in desperate need, the young man returned home humble and remorseful. “But while he was still a long way off,” Jesus said, “his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

Your Father in Heaven is reaching out to you. Don’t keep him at arm’s length. Open your heart to him and reach back. ■



Adapted from *Embracing the Truth* by David Faust (Standard Publishing, 2000), a booklet designed to help believers share their faith. To order, contact Customer Service (800-543-1353).

