

December 22, 2019 Advent Pt 4 – LOVE God With Us Brings Love

Hope = Confident Assurance
Joy = Satisfied Assurance
Peace = Contented Assurance
Love = Compassionate Assurance

“A few years ago the Muppets and CeeLo Green co-performed a Christmas song called “All I Need Is Love,” complete with a music video. In true Muppets form—I don’t know how many Muppets fans we have—but if you haven’t seen it, it’s full of action and humor, and all the favorites show up—from Kermit, Fozzie, and Miss Piggy to Pepe, Gonzo and his chickens, and all the rest. And there’s plenty of bling. CeeLo and the crew sing about all the Christmas presents they could get—fancy toys and the latest technology. But—perhaps ironically—at its core, the song captures the true message of Christmas. The Muppets and CeeLo don’t want all that stuff. All they want or need for Christmas is love. Well, maybe all of them but Miss Piggy anyway. She’s always been quite the material pig. (youTube “The Muppets, Lo-Co Perform Cee-Lo’s ‘All I Need is Love’ on GMA.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpbX5NYtzeU>

I’m quite sure the Muppets never set out to make any grand theological statements with their Christmas song, but the song taps into the truth that all we do need *is* love. Today as we celebrate together the last Sunday on our Advent journey of God with Us, we are celebrating love. When Jesus came into our world as a baby, He was the human embodiment of the gift of God’s love. When He came as Immanuel, God with Us, He came as God incarnate—He came as love incarnate. The word *advent* means “coming” or “arrival,” and the season is marked by expectation, waiting, anticipation, and longing. Advent is not just an extension of Christmas—it is a season that links the past, present, and future. Advent offers us the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, to celebrate His birth, and to be alert for His second coming. Advent looks back in celebration at the hope fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s coming, while at the same time looking forward in hopeful and eager anticipation to the coming of Christ’s kingdom when He returns for His people. During Advent we wait for both—it’s an active, assured, and hopeful waiting. And each week, we focus on a different attribute of God represented in the coming of Jesus: hope, joy, peace and love”. (From *God With Us*. Outreach.com)

“The Advent Candle of Love” (Matthew 1:18-21)

“Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and we have been working our way around the various candles of the Advent Wreath. We saw earlier in this series that the four candles around the outside of the Advent Wreath correspond to the first four fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience” (Galatians 5:22) The four candles around the outside of the wreath stand for hope, peace, joy and love. Hope and patience relate to each other, and so as we work our way around the Advent Wreath at Christmas, it’s good to know we are also working our way backwards through the first four fruit of the Spirit.

Love comes first in the fruit of the Spirit because love is the primary fruit of the Spirit. It is the most important fruit of the Spirit and encompasses all the rest. Love comes last in the four candles around the outside of the Advent Wreath, because love is also the most important of these, and in Advent we are working our way towards the most important aspect of Christmas, which is God’s love for us in Christ.

We will be looking at a number of Scriptures this morning relating to love at Christmas, but we will start with this passage in Matthew 1 right now. (Read Matthew 1:18-21 and pray.)

As we have seen, hope is an important part of the Christmas story. Peace is an important part of the Christmas story. Joy is an important part of the Christmas story. But now we come to love, and love is the most important of all. The Christmas story is all about love, and so we are going to look at four aspects of love at Christmas this morning. **We will look at**

- 1) Joseph’s love for Mary,**
- 2) Mary’s love for Jesus,**
- 3) God’s love for sinners, and**
- 4) our love for one another.**

There would be no Christmas without love, and all four of these are important parts of the Christmas story

I. Joseph's love for Mary

– Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Emmanuel” (which means “God with us”). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a Son. And he gave Him the Name Jesus.*

“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” (Matthew 1:18-19) Joseph chose a third option. Instead of marrying her in defiance of God’s commands, instead of bringing her before the judges in an act of revenge, he thought about what was best for Mary in this situation. And so he decided rather than expose her to public disgrace, he would divorce her quietly. Sure people would still know and talk about her. That was unavoidable. But at least she wouldn’t go through the public humiliation of a trial. Joseph had several options open to him, and he chose the way of love. He chose the way that would bring the least amount of shame and attention to Mary. Love always protects (1 Corinthians 13:7), and Joseph chose to protect Mary, even when he thought she had been unfaithful to him. Joseph’s love for Mary is our first example of love at Christmas”. (Ray Fowler)

II. Mary's love for Jesus

– Luke 2:6-7, 16-19, 34-35

⁶ *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.... ¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

“There is a natural love between every mother and the child she bears. The child has been inside her for months. She has given life to this child. For nine months she has nourished the child with her own body. She has felt every move, every kick, every turn. She has dreamed and imagined what this child would look like. She has gone through the long months of pregnancy, the hard sacrifice of labor, the excruciating pain of childbirth, and now she holds her newborn child in her arms. How could she not love this beautiful new human being who has come from her own body? Mary’s love for Jesus is also indicated in other ways by Scripture. For example, after the shepherds visited Joseph and Mary and then went into the town spreading the word about Jesus, we read in Luke 2:19 that “*Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” (Luke 2:19) The word translated “treasured” in verse 19 is a word that means “to preserve” or “to keep in mind” or even “to keep thinking about something so that you won’t forget it.” The word translated “pondered” is a word that means “to bring together” or “to think deeply or reflect on something.”. (Ray Fowler)

III. God's love for sinners

Matthew 1:21... *And she (Mary) shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins. ²² Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ²³ Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

John 3:26,27...¹⁶ *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* ¹⁷ *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

Romans 8:35-39...³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.* ³⁷ *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,* ³⁹ *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This brings us now to the third aspect of love at Christmas – God’s love for sinners. And this is really the heart of the Christmas story. The Christmas story is all about love. Joseph’s love for Mary and Mary’s love for Jesus are both important parts of that story, but they are not the most important. The central message of love at Christmas is God’s love for sinners.

This is evident from the angel’s words to Joseph about Mary in Matthew 1: *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21) Why was Jesus born into our world at Christmas? It’s all in his name! The name Jesus means “Savior” or “salvation,” and Jesus was born into our world to save his people from their sins.

We read in John 3: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17) The greatest gift ever given at Christmas was the gift of God’s own Son. God gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. Jesus did not merely come into the world. He was sent into the world. God the Father sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

If you ever doubt that God loves you, just look at his Son, Jesus. Look at Jesus the child born into the world as a baby at Christmas.

IV. Our love for one another

1 John 4:10-11...⁷ *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* ⁸ *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* ⁹ *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* ¹¹ *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

We’ve looked at Joseph’s love for Mary, Mary’s love for Jesus, and God’s love for sinners. But there is one more aspect of love at Christmas that we do not want to leave out. And that is our love for one another.

The Bible makes a clear and unbreakable connection between God’s love for us and our love for each other. We read in 1 John 4:10-11: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:10-11) Notice God’s love comes first. God’s love always comes first. God’s love in creating the world; God’s love in promising a Savior; God’s love in sending his Son into the world; God’s love in Jesus dying on the cross for your sins. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) God’s love always comes first. But then our love should follow. “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11) Our love for others should follow, not merely as an obligation, but as a natural outflow of God’s love for us. If God loved you so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die for you, how can you not love others in return? And if God loved others so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die for them, how can you not love them as well? God showed his love for us at Christmas by sending his Son into the world as a sacrifice for our sins. How will you show your love to others this Christmas?”

Benediction

Ephesians 3:17 *“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*