



LOVE

ADVENT | Week 4

Ask any 5th grader you can find and have them finish this sentence, “God is _____.” Nine out of 10 will say, “love.”

You can find the origin of this sentence in the first letter that the Gospel writer John wrote. It says this,

“God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:8-10, ESV).

Notice that John writes, “in this is love...” twice. He wants us to look into what he is describing so that we can rightly see what “love” really means.

The first part of love’s meaning is seen in God sending His only Son into the world. That is what we celebrate on Christmas. The Son of God stepped out of eternity into history. Jesus entered the world as one of us. He became one of us. God became man. He gave Himself to us. You can’t truly know what love means unless you know and believe the Christmas story.

The second part of John’s teaching on love comes in verse 10, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Not only did God give Himself to us in giving us His Son, but He also gave Himself for us in sending His Son to be the *sacrifice for our sin*.

Christmas and the cross come together to show us what it means that, “God is love.” As we peer into the wooden manger this season, may we be reminded of the wooden cross as well.

Because, “in this is love...”

A Father's Selfless Love

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

Seeming betrayal and seeds of doubt. Youth and inexperience. Alone and afraid. Mary and Joseph found themselves in a difficult situation more than 2,000 years ago. Their starting place was shaky ground. Few couples would successfully navigate much less survive such a situation today without immediate support and supernatural intervention.

Mary and Joseph were formally engaged to be married—meaning they were legally bound to each other under Jewish law (v. 18). This was very different from modern day engagements, especially when pregnancy was involved. Mary faced serious consequences for the unborn child she was carrying. Joseph knew this child was not his. He could legally and rightfully turn his future humiliation into vengeance for Mary’s “betrayal” and demand she be stoned. Self-preservation was definitely an option for Joseph.

But Joseph, being a just and righteous man, was not thinking of himself. His focus was on Mary and his love for her. Though the life they expected was not going to be a reality, Joseph could not bring himself to publicly humiliate his bride, much less aid in her death. His selfless love for Mary moved him to seek a quiet divorce (v. 19), the most reasonable of them all.

Joseph’s heart was heavy as he weighed his limited choices (v. 20). But God, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1), lovingly sent an angel of the Lord to show Joseph the best option of all.

He comforted and assured Joseph that there was nothing to fear by marrying Mary. She was still the same Mary—faithful, trustworthy and God-fearing. The angel confirmed the baby was indeed placed in her womb by the Holy Spirit and there was no reason to doubt her integrity. He even threw in a gender reveal! Spoiler alert...it’s a boy! Better yet, the son Joseph would raise as his own would be called Jesus, and he would “save his people from their sins” (v. 21).

Imagine the love that ignited inside Joseph as soon as he heard the news of Jesus. The boy he would parent and protect would also be his Savior. The Jewish people, including Joseph and Mary, had anticipated the long-awaited Messiah for many generations. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 to confirm this prophecy was fulfilled by the events in verses 20-21, confirming Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 23).

Joseph quickly obeyed God and married his bride (v. 24). He loved and honored her well until the arrival of God’s son (v. 25). Thankfully Jesus was God’s son, not Joseph’s. Jesus was fully man and fully God, making him the ultimate sacrifice to one day atone for sin.

All of us face the eternal consequences of sin. As Joseph responded to Mary in selfless love, God also responds in love—in fact, He is love (1 John 4:7-21). The greatest exhibit of His love for us was through the giving of His son, Jesus (John 3:16). God’s rescue plan to save us from sin and eternal separation from Him exhibited the greatest act of love creation has ever known.

“As Joseph responded to Mary in selfless love, God also responds in love—in fact, He is love.”

Jesus Christ's birth as a helpless baby on earth, His death as an innocent man on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead as our conquering King was His love in action. May we celebrate and reflect God's selfless love to one another this season.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. What character qualities does God display in today's passage?
2. What motivated Joseph's responses/actions throughout the passage?
3. What motivates your thoughts, words and deeds throughout the day?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. How would you describe Joseph?
2. How did God show His love for you in today's passage?
3. How can you respond in love to others and point them to Christ?

Song of Meditation | "*Love is the Theme*"

by Albert C. Fisher

Of the themes that men have known,
One supremely stands alone;
Through the ages it has shown,
'Tis His wonderful, wonderful love.

Love is the theme, love is supreme;
Sweeter it grows, glory bestows;
Bright as the sun ever it glows!
Love is the theme, eternal theme!

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

