



# LOVE

## ADVENT | Week 4

Ask any 5<sup>th</sup> 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...”

## Glory in the Highest

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“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:8-20 (ESV)

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This is one of the most familiar texts in the New Testament. Perhaps the words conjure up an image of Linus on a stage, clutching his blanket, and asking, “Lights, please?” before he speaks these words to explain the true meaning of Christmas to Charlie Brown. Hopefully the words have not become too familiar to still prick our hearts.

Earlier in chapter 2, Mary and Joseph had gone to Bethlehem in Judea to register for the census. While they were there, the baby came, and He was laid in a manger because there was no room or proper bed for Him elsewhere. Then the scene shifts—not to the new parents or family members, but to an unlikely group: shepherds. Just like the baby, they too were somewhere unusual and uncomfortable and lowly. They were in the fields while others were asleep in bed.

When the angel came, the glory of the Lord did not just appear before their eyes, but “shone around them” (v. 9). They were enveloped in His full glory, like a loving embrace that brings joy instead of fear. Indeed, the angel’s message was one of joy: the long-awaited Messiah, your Savior, the Lord, has been born. He has not come in military power with armor and chariots and a sword. He has come as a fragile, lowly newborn, swaddled and laid in a feeding trough.

**“For all ages, angels had watched this gospel story unfold before men, and now the Lord had done it.”**

These shepherds were not the only ones to hear the message on this night. When the angels of heaven heard this joyful announcement, they all showed up to celebrate! For all ages, angels had watched this gospel story unfold before men, and now the Lord had done it. In love, the Father had sent His Son in flesh and blood to redeem and reconcile mankind to Himself. And the angels couldn’t contain their worship; they filled the skies over Judea to join in the chorus giving praise to the Lord. What a glorious sound it must have been!

Likewise, the shepherds also worshipped and glorified the Lord after they found the baby in the manger. Their status did not keep them from spreading the word to everyone they saw. And then they rejoiced their way back to their fields and flocks, forever changed by the glory that they had encountered that night.

Mary also worshipped. For nine months, she had meditated on Gabriel’s announcement that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High. (Luke 1:30-33) Now this truth had been verified by strangers smelling of sheep, who had been washed in the glory of the Lord in the middle of the night. This information was too lofty for her to grasp but too weighty for her to brush off. She realized the gravity of this moment and personally worshipped her Savior.

When we grasp the tremendous depth of love that it took for God to provide salvation and hope to us through the flesh of His very own Son, our immediate

response must be worship. Whether we worship the Lord powerfully like the angels, enthusiastically like the shepherds, or meditatively like Mary, He is worthy of all of our praise. It was not simply to fulfill a duty or complete a plan. God encapsulated all of His eternal, powerful, overwhelming love for us in one tiny infant.

Glory to God in the highest! May we receive His loving Gift with enthusiasm and worship! And may His people be changed into His likeness as we glorify Him in all things.

### **Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions**

1. What does this scene reveal about the character of God?
2. Have you ever been overwhelmed with worship of the Lord the way that the angels were?
3. As you “ponder these things in your heart,” what else does the Holy Spirit tell you about Jesus?

### **Further Reflection | Family Study Questions**

1. How do you think Mary felt when the shepherds told her about their encounter in the fields?
2. What names or titles did the angel give for Jesus?
3. Take some time to thank the Lord for all of the ways He has loved you.

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