



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...”

Enduring, Unfailing Love

“Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, “so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

Matthew 4:12-16 (ESV)

Darkness. We are first introduced to the concept in the beginning, when Genesis 1:2 states, “The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep.” This was before life as we know it ‘was.’ Historically, darkness evokes feelings of fear and foreboding; it’s also a mark of physical and spiritual blindness. Unreflecting, it only absorbs what surrounds it.

It was darkness that engulfed the Israelites as they languished in Egyptian slavery. Hearing their cries of oppression and despair, God called them out to be a people for Himself—a people meant to experience and reflect His glory, hope, and faithful love to a dark world.

Israel was a nation of people who failed, choosing not to return God’s affections or share His love with others. They were a rebellious people. A defeated people. A people who loved darkness and moved further and further from their God as history marched on.

And yet, God had not moved. And His covenant people would not be left in darkness.

As Isaiah so prophesied: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

In Galilee, in Bethlehem (in what would have been Zebulun in the long ago Northern Kingdom of Israel), Light entered the world’s darkness. Just as God spoke physical light into the darkness of Genesis 1, the true Light, predicted by Isaiah, was realized in the person of Jesus Christ. A reflecting Light—the exact image of the Father and His unfailing, covenant-keeping love!

O, what love is this, that God would send His Son, a Light among his wayward people, and not for them only! A light among Jews and Gentiles. A light that was a promise fulfilled. A light becoming brighter during His time on earth, through His ministry, death, and resurrection. A light made brighter as His love persevered through men’s dark deeds of jealousy, fear, rejection, persecution, and death. A love superior to any other possible expression of love.

“O, what love is this,
that God would
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wayward people...”

This was a love of sacrifice—the sacrifice, not only of the cross, but sacrifice that would lay aside glory, empty itself, condescend to manhood—even a helpless infant—for the sake of the ones loved.

Yes, “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).

Jesus Christ is the only Light strong enough to pierce the darkness of our hearts and make us new, giving eternal life and providing an enduring, life-changing love.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. How does the love of Christ reflect from you into a dark world?
2. What steps could you take to show Christ’s love to your family in a new, more complete way? Your co-workers? Your friends? People on the fringes of your life? Strangers? Those who you consider an enemy? Ask God for the desire, wisdom, and guidance to accomplish His purposes for loving others through you in a way that is reflective of Jesus.

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. What words and phrases does Matthew use to describe Jesus in this passage? What was Jesus called to do in Galilee? Read the passage below. How does Matthew later say we are to follow His example?

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16

2. In the Bible, “darkness” is often contrasted with “light” to represent the difference between sin and righteousness. Where do you sense areas of “darkness” in your own life, your school, your community, and in the world today? How does the light of Christ reflect from you into dark places? What could you do to let your light shine even more brightly so that those living in darkness will come to glorify God?

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

