



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...”

Lady in Waiting

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Luke 2:36–38 (ESV)

A favorite Christmas traditions in many families is the Christmas calendar. It is some version of a calendar made of cloth or wood or other material with a tiny pocket or opening for each day of December leading up to Christmas Day. Every day, anticipation grows and excitement builds as you move one day closer to Christmas.

In America, most families put up the tree in the living room and lights on the house. Each day, the number of wrapped and bagged packages under the tree grows. Christmas music plays and favorite movies of the season are watched. Special books are read. We totally immerse ourselves in the coming of Christmas. We “long for” its arrival if you will. It is like we begin to see everything around us with “Christmas eyes.”

The birth of Jesus was the long-awaited fulfillment of the promises that God had made throughout the history of His people. He created for them a longing and expectation that was meant to inspire in them a hope for the future, an urgency for

the present and a perspective of the past.

That's why Luke gives us the gift of Anna. She is the most obscure character in all the narrative surrounding Jesus' birth. In the long chapters of Luke's Gospel, she occupies the real estate of three verses in the middle of chapter two. It is likely you have read over those verses and missed her altogether. But Luke wants us to catch a glimpse of the birth of Jesus through her "Christmas eyes."

She is an old woman. She is probably 105 years old and has been a widow for 85 years. We are told she is a prophetess, a role that had faded in her recent years. When God does not grant revelation for 400 years, the message of the prophets can tend to feel stale to the people around. "Yeah, yeah... we've heard all of this before!"

She is not famous. She is not significant. She is not wealthy. She is not even profound. Luke does not record a single word she ever uttered.

But, she is remembered. Luke was a historian. He interviewed eyewitnesses. He spent time with Mary and the disciples. He studied everything there was about Jesus. And somewhere in all that the name Anna kept coming up.

Maybe it was Mary that recounted, "I remember the year Jesus was born. We took him to the Temple as the law instructed. There was this widowed woman, old and thin. She was there serving the temple. I'll never forget when her eyes met Jesus. Such joy and compassion filled her soul. She knew him. He was only a month old, but she had been looking for him all her life."

The emperor was looking for more taxes. The religious leaders were looking for more favor. Young men were looking for wives. Young women were hoping for children. Worshippers were looking for mercy from God. But Anna was looking for Jesus. And she had found him.

"God was not silent any longer. His voice was loud and clear in the cooing of this child..."

For more than 80 years, she came daily to the temple, praying and worshipping. She skipped lunch and dinner, sometimes for days or weeks. She longed and waited and hoped. And then one day, an unsuspecting couple shows up at the temple for the routine purification... and her eyes meet this child.

Could it be? God was not silent any longer. His voice was loud and clear in the cooing of this child held tightly to his mother's chest. God was with them. God was here. She beheld him. At long last, He had returned!

Luke wants us to know Anna. He wants us to see her. She has a joy and amazement that was greater than those around her because what she longed for

was greater! She never settled for the lesser things. She had “Christmas eyes,” and her excitement overflowed to all around her.

As believers, this is a good reminder. We want to cultivate a longing for greater joy. It may be that you find yourself caught up in the spirit of Christmas but uncommitted in your heart the person whose birth we celebrate. And we not only celebrate the birth of Jesus, but we also want to expectantly long for His return.

Jesus’ return will eclipse the joy and excitement of any Christmas morning we’ve ever experienced a million times a million. And Christians today long for a Christmas to come that will last forever!

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. What is something you are waiting on or longing for in your life today?
2. How does that waiting and longing you have help you in your perspective regarding waiting and longing for the coming of Jesus?
3. What steps can you take to help cultivate more deeply a longing for Jesus’ return?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. What is your favorite Christmas tradition or event?
2. Describe something in the future that you are excited about.
3. What would it look like and feel like in our family to have an excitement about the day that Jesus will return?

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

