

The Birth of Jesus Christ

This message is for the Fourth Sunday of Advent; we have been working our way around the candles of the Advent Wreath learning different aspects of the Christmas Story. This has been a difficult series as I was only able to deliver God’s Word from the pulpit for the first week of Advent. Since Advent is a time sensitive series; weeks 2 to 4 are posted for your study. 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 in reverse; [“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience ...”](#). This sermon series has addressed the four candles around the outside of the wreath that represent hope, peace, joy and this message of love.

I look forward to our coming together again to finish the Advent series on Christmas eve. So, good to be out of the hospital and home. Praying for those who have also been sick and are regaining their strength. Looking forward to coming together again as the family of God and as brothers and sisters of Christ. Our love of Christ will join us together to celebrate His birth, understanding what God the Father did; [“We love because he first loved us.”](#) (1 John 4:19) So, considering God’s agape love we come to the 4th candle.

Love comes first in the fruit of the Spirit because love is the primary fruit. 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 the candles and we have been working towards the most important aspect of Christmas; God’s love for us in Christ.

We will be examining a number of Scriptures relating to love at Christmas, we start with Matthew chapter 1, ¹⁸[“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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” Dear Lord please use this message to open our hearts to Your love for us through Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

As we have seen, hope, peace and joy are important parts of the Christmas story. Today we come to love and love is the most important of all the fruit of Spirit and of the Christmas story. The Christmas story is all about love, so we are going to explore four aspects of love that are foundational to the Christmas story. First, Joseph’s love for Mary. Second, Mary’s love for Jesus. Third, God’s love for sinners and fourth, our love for one another. There would be no Christmas without our seeing God’s agape love and all four of these love attributes reveal aspects of agape love so important in understanding and experiencing the Christmas story.

Joseph’s Love For Mary

I begin with Joseph’s love for Mary, which is an incredibly important part of the Christmas story. You might respond, “Of course Joseph loved Mary, after all they were betrothed.” Yes, they were betrothed, but that did not necessarily mean that Joseph loved her. In those days and time people often got married for reasons other than love. Marriages were typically arranged by the spouses’ parents. Many times, marriage was viewed more as a social or economic relationship rather than romantically based like today. A couple, over time, as they shared their lives grew to love each.

So how do we know Joseph loved Mary? We know because of his response when Mary was found to be pregnant during the betrothal, before they were married, before they had come together as husband and wife. As far as Joseph knew, his first impression was, Mary had been unfaithful to him and slept with another man. Joseph must have felt completely betrayed by this and would have had every right to be angry and upset with Mary, and divorce her and publicly put her to shame.

Now Joseph had several options here. He could go ahead and marry her anyways, knowing that the child was not his. However, that would have gone against his convictions as a man committed to God and God's ways. No matter how much he loved Mary, he needed to put his relationship with God first.

He could have dragged her before the tribunal and had her tried for adultery. This would have been a vindictive move. At the very least Mary would be publicly disgraced or even worse, she could be sentenced to death by stoning.

But what did Joseph do instead? We read his decision in Matthew 1, verses 18 and 19, [“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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”](#) 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. That brought him to decide rather than expose her to public disgrace, he would divorce her quietly. Even so, people would still know and talk about her. That was unavoidable. But at least she would not 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 others. As Paul instructed, [⁴“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or](#)

boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) Joseph choose the path that honored his God and protected Mary, even though at that point he thought she had been unfaithful. Joseph’s example of love expressed is the first example of sacrificial love, agape love, in the Christmas story.

Mary’s Love For Jesus

Secondly, we have Mary’s love for Jesus. We read in Luke 2, ⁴“Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” This is the Christmas story we all know, the story we have heard and the manger scene we have placed in our homes each Christmas season. The first Christmas, were Mary gives birth to her firstborn, a Son, conceived by the Most Hight God. Jesus is God’s Son, but also a child whose mother tenderly wraps him and takes him to her breast.

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 first 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 Good News about Jesus, we read ¹⁹ **“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”** ²⁰ **And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”** (Luke 2:19-20) 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 will not forget it.” The word translated **“pondering”** is a word that means “to bring together” or “to think deeply or reflect on something.” Together these words tell us that Mary did not want to lose a single memory of all that happened that night. She kept running through the events over and over again in her mind so she would not forget. She thought deeply about these happenings, bringing all the individual memories together and wondering what it all could mean. Mary's love for Jesus was reflected in her very thoughts about Him. Her thoughts were captive to Christ, and she made every effort to remember every detail as she sought to understand the meaning of His birth.

Her love for Jesus is also revealed by the words Simeon spoke over Jesus and Mary in the temple. We met Simeon before in this Advent series. Remember, God had promised Simeon that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. God's Spirit moved Simeon to enter the temple courts just as Joseph and Mary were bringing Jesus into the temple to present him to the Lord. Simeon took Jesus into his arms and prophesied over him, we examined that prophecy earlier in this series. Simeon said to God, ²⁹ **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** As Joseph and Mary marveled at Simeon's declaration the prophet turns his attention to them, blessed them and said to Mary, **“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your**

own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” In effect Simeon told Mary that there were difficult days ahead for her Son, Jesus. Mary did not know how difficult at the time, but Simeon gave her forewarning when he told her that a sword would pierce her own soul as a mother who would experience the excruciating death of her firstborn Son.

True to this word of prophecy, Mary suffered greatly as Jesus grew to be a man. Jesus was no ordinary Son. He belonged first to His heavenly Father – as Jesus reminded Joseph and Mary in the temple when He was twelve years’ old, telling them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49) Jesus was operating on God the Father’s time table, not Joseph or Mary’s – and this had to be an adjustment for his parents in the normal parent-to-child relationship. By the time of the wedding at Cana Joseph was no longer and Jesus made clear to His mom at the wedding in Cana when the wine ran out. She wanted him to do as she asked and He did but also let her know His heavenly Father was in control, telling his mom, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4) Mary had the honor of being used by God but had to learn to give up all control for the Son she loved, Jesus was under God’s control as God’s plan for salvation unfolded. When it came time for Jesus to die, Mary was there at the cross. John tells us she was near the cross as she watched her Son suffered and died there in shame.

²⁵ “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother ... ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:25-27) Jesus loved His mother and made sure she too was cared for – love is foundational to the Christmas Story.

So yes, Simeon’s words were absolutely and brutally true. A sword would pierce Mary’s own soul. Why? Because her Son was destined to suffer and die, and she loved

her Son deeply. That is the second aspect of love that is part of the Christmas story, Mary's sacrificial love for Jesus and her love and submission to God.

God's Love For Sinners

We now come to the third aspect of love at Christmas – God's love for sinners. This is really the heart and soul 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 found in Matthew chapter 1, “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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ^(Isaiah 7:14) ²³ ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’” ^(Matthew 1:20-23) Why was Jesus born into our world at Christmas? It is 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 the words of Jesus, God the Son, in John chapter 3, ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” The greatest gift ever given at Christmas was the gift of God's own Son. Jesus did not merely come into the world but He was sent into the world by God the Father, not to condemn the world, but to save the world because of God's agape love for His creation.

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. Look at Jesus the man, teaching the people, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Look at Jesus the Savior, suffering and dying on the cross for your sins to bring you back into relationship to God. Look at Jesus the King, risen from the dead, ascended to heaven, coming back for you to take you to be with Him that you also may be where He is forever.

When you give your life to Christ, the path is clear, ³⁷ “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39) The world no longer holds us and the only thing that break your relationship with Christ is you. You belong to Christ and no longer walk with the world. The Christmas story is all about love, but the most important part of the story is God’s love for sinners. God so loved the world; he gave us His Son so that we would not perish but have eternal life.

Love For One Another

We have quickly explored Joseph’s love for Mary, Mary’s love for Jesus, and God’s love for sinners. There is one more aspect of love at Christmas that I do not want to leave out; 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 John’s first letter, ⁷ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ 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. 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

(1 John 4:7-12) Notice with me, that 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. Verse 10 is key, “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.”

God’s love always comes first and demonstrates to us what is right and then our love should follow. My beloved, as the children of the Living God we should set aside petty differences and express a great love for one another. The world attacks but together we can stand for Christ by our love for Him and each other. 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? If God loved others so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die for them, how can you not love them as well? Paul wrote the church in Corinth for he knew if they were to flourish in that evil city for the cause of Christ - love was key. ⁴“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

So, Christmas, the story of Christ’s birth, is not only a reminder of how much God loves you, but also how much you should love other people. Is there someone you need to help this Christmas? Is there someone you need to reach out to this Christmas? Is there someone you need to forgive this Christmas? Show your love for Christ by loving others.

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?