

## **Love of Advent**

Christmas Feelings: Part 4 “Love of Advent”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 24, 2023

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

**Readings:** 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

**Reflection:** Luke 1:46b-55

**Greeting:** A voice is crying out: “Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!” “Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!” Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout “Here is your God!”

**Prayer:** Merciful God, you sent the prophets as your messengers to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to listen to their warnings and to let our lives be changed through your grace. Help us once more to celebrate the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas that you stir with your steadfast love and strengthen by your faithfulness that endures forever. May you build us up with feelings of hope, peace, joy, and love as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

**Reflection:** Luke 1:46b-55

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1:46b-55 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Mary and hear a celebration of what God will do. Mary is celebrating not just what God has done for her, but what God will do in days to come. That she recalls all of the love that God has shown to his people. How do we celebrate all that God has done for us? Do we recall what God has done when share the love of God with others? Do we recognize that we are blessed by God’s presence in our lives? Do we share in those blessings in all that we are and all that we do? What does it mean to be a loving presence in a troubled world? How do you prepare your heart and life for the miracle that is Christmas?

**Prayer:** Lord, prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas this Advent. That we come before you this day experiencing the love that we find in preparing for the coming of our Savior. May your Holy Spirit guide us from darkness into the light of your love. As we come before you today, we bring to you the joys and concerns that we have spoken aloud together and shared in this place. We come to you silently with the worries and celebrations of our hearts. We pray you will help us to grow in faith through both sorrow and gladness. That through our laughter and our tears you will be with us. May we experience your mercy as you guide us in hope, peace, joy, and love in a celebration of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 1 through 11 and 16.

*Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.*

*(2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 16, verses 25 through 27.

*Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.*

*(Romans 16:25-27 NRSV\*)*

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38.

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

*(Luke 1:26-38 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This last Sunday of Advent is about love. We finish with love because it is love that ties everything together in Advent. It pulls together our Christmas feelings of hope, peace, and joy as part of our love. We experience them all as we prepare for Christmas, and we don't have much time left to prepare. We focus on those Christmas feelings that we experience through both the love that we give and the love that we receive. We trust in love as a central part of our theology, in the way that we think about loving God and loving our neighbor. They help us to center in on those Christmas feelings of love and the way that they enable us to love God and neighbor more deeply. That we love the fact that God is with us. That we are able to love a God who share love with us so that we may better love one another. That we may be made complete in Christ. I'm reminded of the words of Mary in our reflection today. That her celebration of God's love is shown in her words. That she celebrates the hope she has in God, in the joy that she finds in God's justice, and in the peace that this child will bring to the people. And it is all expressed in her words of love as she praises God. She praises God for the love shown to the least and the last. That it is not the proud and the powerful that find a rest with the Lord. Instead, she celebrates a God who fills the hungry with food and who lifts up the lowly. She praises God for his justice, his faithfulness, and his love.

It is that love that binds us together and brings us closer to one another on Christmas. Because it is the same love that we have when we praise God here in this place. When we lift up our prayers together, when we lift up our voices with song, when we join together in reading scripture, we share in the love of God. All of those things help us to prepare for God's great love. A love that we see expressed in the birth of a child, born and laid in a manger. Born to set us free from sin and death. Born to give us a hope beyond hope. Born so that we would know

peace. Born that we may experience joy together. All through the birth that is an expression of God's love. And we rediscover those feelings in Advent as we prepare for the birth of our Savior. So how do we prepare for such a great gift? How do we prepare ourselves for love? We prepare by thinking about the ways that we have experienced the love of Christ in our lives. Our Gospel reading today approaches the Nativity. We hear of the angel visiting Mary and letting her know that she will be with child. We hear of how she celebrates this good news. That she is told that her relative Elizabeth is already pregnant. Elizabeth who was thought to be unable to have a child. Elizabeth who will give birth to John the Baptist. Mary is told that her son will be the Son of the Most High and that he will be given the throne of his ancestor David. That the throne is established forever and will be the throne of Christ. All so that justice, kindness, mercy, and grace are all found in the Christ. And the love that Mary has in all of this is an overwhelming gratitude that all of these things will come through here. That I think of those words she has as a response to the angel of the Lord. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." She gladly take on this role, accepting the blessing of the Lord. That she sees this a sign of God's love for both her and for all people everywhere. That she sees it as a sign of justice, strength, and faithfulness.

When I think about Christmas and I think about the love involved, I think about how we can prepare for it by reflecting that love. That Mary does it by singing God's praises, thankful that the Christ child will be a part of her life. Thankful for something that she will be able to share. Thankful for an opportunity to be a part of this great love. And that's one of the things that I think about as I prepare my heart for the love that is Christmas. Because I think about the way that I can show my appreciation for the love that I have found in Christ, for the love that I have discovered in God's grace and mercy, and the love that I have discovered in sharing a life in Christ with others. I think about those feelings that come across in our celebration of the miracle that is Christmas. I think about the hope that I have because of the fact that I am celebrating our Emmanuel, God with us, right here with you. I think about the peace that I have because I get to share this experience of God's love with you. I think about the joy that my family and I have found here with you, celebrating the birth of our Savior. I think about all the ways that I can prepare once again for that celebration. I think about the love that we share here together. Because it's all of those feelings that come together on Christmas. That it's not just that God is with us, but that we have a place where we belong with our God, with our Emmanuel. That it means that we have a place to call home, a place where we will always belong. A place where we can experience love together. That because of love, we have a place where all people can discover the hope of Christ. That because of love, we have a place where all people may come to know God's peace. That because of love it is a place where all people can come to find joy. Because we share together in a place where all people may come to experience love. We prepare for the love of Christ by showing love to one another. Because the best way to prepare for that great love is to show love. Because as we give and receive love, we more deeply experience the love that we find in Christ. As we show love for one another, we gain a deeper understanding of the love that we may have for our God.

And as that love grows, it helps us to prepare for an even greater love. That we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child because it prepares us for him coming into our lives this very hour. That we once again open our hearts to let them grow in love. That we welcome Christ in to touch our lives and bless us once again. That we may once again be reminded of how wonderful that love is. That we may remember how uniquely special the love and care of Christ is when we see it in each other's faces. When we experience that love as we hear it in each other's words. That we are reminded of love in the way that we live it through each other's actions. So, now the time has drawn near. The time we have prepared for is almost at hand. So let us prepare the way for the Lord. Let us make a highway in the desert for our God. A highway full of hope. A road that leads to peace. A path where we discover joy. Because the destination of that highway is love. Let us prepare our hearts for the hope, peace, joy, and love that we experience, and let us prepare our Christmas feelings once again for the miracle that is Christmas. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Christmas Feelings**

Our Advent and Christmas series is called “Christmas Feelings.” We will be looking at the feelings we have from Advent, Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Epiphany. Each week takes on a different feeling and how we carry them with us as we look forward to another year with Christ. Let’s celebrate our Christmas feelings!

12/3: Hope of Advent	12/10: Peace of Advent	12/17: Joy of Advent
12/24: Love of Advent	12/24: Celebration of Christmas	
12:31: Old and New Year	1/7: Gift of Christmas	

## **Prayer List**

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Calvin St. Michael	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams		

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

\* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.