PART 4 HIS GREAT LOVE

[1JOHN 4:7-14](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John4%3A7-14&version=NKJV); [JOHN 15:9-17](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John15%3A9-17&version=NKJV)

For the past few weeks, we have unwrapped the gifts of advent: Hope, Peace, & Joy.

And today, as we draw closer to the celebration of Christmas Day, we unwrap the gift of love. His love is manifested as a baby in a manger, who came to Earth to reconcile man to God, to redeem us. The Christ child enters here as a light into the darkness. Christ steps into a world of darkness and pain, not to establish an earthly kingdom but an eternal one. This eternal kingdom He is populating with people of every tribe and tongue—a rescue mission to seek and save they who were and are lost. Why? Because He is Love! He loves YOU with a love beyond comprehension, all consuming and complete. So this morning, my prayer for us is that we view the Nativity, the birth—Christmas—through the lens of the cross, the kingdom and His coming again. The question then is this: “What will I do with this gift? Beyond advent, after Christmas, for the rest of my life, what will I do with all the gifts of advent, all summed up in His love?”

[1John 4:8](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John4%3A8&version=NKJV) tells us, “God is Love.” It is His nature. And, Church, to truly experience this love changes everything about us. So many people, even believers, find it hard to walk in this love. We believe in the miracle of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the visit of angels, but we find it difficult to believe that we are loved by a Holy God.

Christmas reminds us that God came to us, for us, and is with us. [1John 3:1-2](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John3%3A1-2&version=NKJV) calls directly to us Christians: “See! Behold, look upon how great a love.” Embrace His love, embrace Him, and be embraced by Him. In this love, we have a tithe, a testimony, and a triumph because of the cradle, the cross, and the crown. God loves you, and, you can’t change that. For a million reasons, God could choose not to love me, but not one of them has changed His love for me. God loves you, and you cannot change that. His love invites, provides, transforms, empowers, and equips.

To experience hope, peace, and joy is to experience the fullness of His love. Paul Washer said, “God is not a god who simply tolerates you. He is the God who loves you, the God who desires you.” In this love, there is freedom. But this great love results in a response of obedience. We reciprocate in love and respond to His love with obedience. We love others ([1John4: 19-21](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John4%3A19-21&version=NKJV) and [1John5: 3](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1John5%3A3&version=NKJV)). Christ equips us to love one another. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians5%3A22&version=NKJV)). And if we are to do this correctly and effectively, we must live loved. Remember, this gift of love has a name: Emmanuel, God with us. Love invests. In love and with love, He invests in you.

And this investment changes our condition, changes our position, so we can love others. [Luke2: 11](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke2%3A11&version=NKJV) says He is “a savior.” And He tells us, ”Love your neighbor as yourself” ([Matthew 19:19](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew19%3A19&version=NKJV)). This commandment He spoke, even though His neighbors persecuted Him, then hung Him on a cross. We are equipped to love because He loves. Beyond the manger, beyond advent, our response should be like that of Mary to the angel announcing her service as the earthly mother of God in [Luke1: 38](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke1%3A38&version=NKJV): “I am the Lord’s, may it be done according to your word.” We need to think, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so” and TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD!

Last year when our church group toured the Holy Land and visited the Church of the Nativity, first we all saw the ornate trimmings, the palatial building. But our glimpse of the grotto beneath the altar, believed to be the cave of the Savior’s birth, had about it nothing spectacular. But the gift it once protected now dwells in the heart of every believer. We should be amazed and grateful that the Son of God would leave the majesty of Heaven just so that we could experience Love Incarnate, and His forgiveness. Oh! The wonder that we ever are the objects of His love!

Church, I have a challenge for you this Christmas. This may be a different Christmas message from that you are used to, but hear me out. In Luke 10:38, Martha spent her time and energies in busy work. Verse 40 says she was distracted. She had welcomed Jesus, but we see that Mary, her sister, had chosen *the good part* of the Lord’s visit. She was seated at the feet of Jesus, loving and being loved. Martha invited Jesus into her home when Mary welcomed Jesus into her heart.

\*Listen, perfect preparation is fine; we appreciate the trimmings of the holiday. But don’t miss the good part. Even if the meal is great, everyone is home for Christmas, everyone loves the gifts, and every light on the tree burn--if all that is going well--but if you miss the Savior, you’ve missed *the good part*. I encourage you to prioritize the only necessary thing, Jesus. Share in Holy Communion together, read the Christmas story together, sit in prayer, meditate on His presence, and be determined to live loved even after the tree comes down.

Again, I ask, “What will you do with this gift?”

[John 13:34-35](https://classic.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John13%3A34-35&version=NKJV) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35**By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”