

## **Advent, Day 22—December 22, 2024**

### *Love*

Excerpts from today's sermon: "Deliverer of the Word, Deliverer of Love"

Throughout Advent we have been meditating upon God's Word in the many ways that it takes form—in the written scriptures, in the spoken prophecies, in the promise of the covenant, and, of course, in the flesh. The Word did not simply appear as flesh out of thin air, though. The Word became flesh through a human being just as you and I became flesh through a human being. And this human being did not just bring the Word in the flesh into being, she carried him, birthed him, fed him, raised him, taught him, surely disciplined him some, protected him, supported him, marveled at him, accompanied him, learned from him, and grieved for him. In short, she loved him into life, loved him through life, and loved him into new life. A good friend of mine once shared with me that on her own birthday she always sends her mom flowers because really it was the day of her mom's labor of love and thus a day to give thanks to her mom. This has always stuck with me, and it resonates especially at Christmas time. We do and certainly should celebrate Jesus' entry into the world, AND we should celebrate and give thanks to Mary for her labor of love in bringing him into the world.

She has had several titles over the millennia in the various traditions of our faith: Mother of Christ, Mother of God, Saint, Madonna, Queen of Heaven. I am going to propose a new one today: Mary, Deliverer of the Word, Deliverer of Love. Once again, that Word has more than one meaning. As we just marveled about, she delivered the Word of God, bringing Jesus into this world in the flesh. As we will marvel about now, she also delivered the Word in the sense of proclamation, preaching, and prophecy. We preachers sometimes call what we do delivering the Word, and wow did Mary ever deliver the Word! She delivered some of the most powerful words ever spoken...or sung!

*Magnificat!*

*Magnificat!*

*Magnificat, anima mea dominum!*

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.”

To ensure the fulfillment of this prophecy, the fulfillment of *the* promise, she expected Love, she conceived Love, she carried Love, she gave birth to Love, she lost sleep for Love, she nourished Love, she raised Love, she guided Love, she played with Love, she put up with the stubbornness of Love, she helped Love get to the people, she cried tears of joy for Love, she wept in brokenness for Love, she gave life to Love. She sang for Love.

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring*

*Let the fires of your justice burn*

*Wipe away all tears*

*For the dawn draws near*

*And the world is about to turn!*

I have been thinking a lot about moms this week whose experiences mirror so much of Mary's. I have been thinking about the moms in Madison, Wisconsin, who are grieving their children ripped from them by gun violence at school and about the moms all over this country who are once again reminded that there is so much to fear for their children in an empire that worships weapons and power. I have been thinking about the moms on journeys through hostile terrain and even more hostile borders, trying to get their young children to safety. I have been thinking about the moms in the Palestine of today, whose children are being targeted like Jesus was targeted, whose children are being executed like Jesus was executed because of their potential to transform the world. And that right there will lead to my concluding word. For, the truth is that every single blessed child delivered in God's good creation is like a Word delivered—a part of the transformation of the world, a part of the fulfillment of God's Word. Every single blessed child is Love delivered. Every single blessed child should be allowed to live and thrive as such. This is how we can best honor Mary, the deliverer of the Word! This is how we can best honor the many mother figures who have given us life and sustained our lives. By striving for a world in which all children are loved into the fullness of their being and then live full, beloved lives.

### **Advent, Day 23—December 23, 2024**

#### *Love*

There is so little time and so much to say about love, so “love” will be our word again and again. After all, “The greatest of these is love,” and God *is* love. It is the best word of all the words. It is the best phenomenon of all the phenomena. It is the best feeling of all the feelings. It is the best inspiration and motivation of all the sources of inspiration and motivation. It is the best action of all the actions and the best way of all the ways. As we think about this season and its themes, it all goes back to love. Hope comes from our belief in love. Peace comes from our enactment of love. Joy comes from our experience of love. Christ came because of love. Hallelujah!

Now I know that love means a lot of different things to different people. It is sentiment, sensation, expression, action, passion, and more. It is used with varying degrees of intensity and levels of inflection, running the gamut from liking to obsessing. It is used in reference to things to foods to places to experiences to activities to people. So with all of this, how can we gain any clarity on what love actually (aha good movie!) is?

When we say that God is love, clearly that carries a lot more import than most other meanings. And that is where we ought to turn our gaze for this discussion. If God is love, then the life of God incarnate shows us the truest embodiment of love. Jesus' love was embodied in thought, feeling, teaching, expression, and action—in short it was an entire way of life. He radically changed the concept of thought by saying that our thoughts are just as significant as our actions, and so consistency of love in our thoughts matters. He felt love unconditionally for everyone he encountered, and he felt particular love for his friends and chosen family. He taught love with his great commandments and through exemplified action. He expressed love through touch and word and healing and praying and feeding and inspiring. He made love into action by seeking the total transformation of the world in a way that make every blessed child of God truly experience love, truly experience God.

In all of this I see integrity—thought, feeling, teaching, expression, and action aligned in a holistic way of living. It is unity within the self and universal in application. We are not Jesus of Nazareth, but we can certainly have an integrity built upon love. We can pursue love in every aspect of our living and being. We can share love with everyone we meet. We can act with love in how we seek the transformation of the world.

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear!”—1 John 4:16b-18a

### **Advent, Day 24—December 24, 2024**

#### *Love*

We've made it, loved ones! Merry Christmas Eve! For this closing reflection, I share excerpts on the Word and Love from tonight's candlelight meditation:

Throughout Advent we have been learning and living and loving God's Word. We have been hearing God's Word as written in the scriptures, as proclaimed by the prophets, and as sung by the great prophetess. We have been reflecting on God's Word as the promise of the covenant and coming to understand in the profoundest ways how God keeps God's Word, how God keeps the promise to love us into life, to love us through life, and to love us into new life. And, most significantly, we have seen how God's Word was kept by way of the Incarnation, through the coming of the Word in the flesh.

What exactly does that mean, though, for the Word to become flesh? The idea comes from John, that gifted wordsmith of a gospel writer. His opening poetry washes over us with this line: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* John starts out by giving us a glimpse of our Triune God before time, before Creation. The Word was *with* God, meaning that the Word was a distinct entity from the Father. And the Word *was* God, meaning that at the same time they were one. The Spirit, of course, was there as well...God in three persons, blessed Trinity! And the Word, the Son of God, one and the same as God, became human.

Let's take a step back and look at that! The Word became human! That means that all the scriptures and prophecies and songs were embodied in a body like ours! That means that God's Word, God's covenant, God's promise of loving us into life, loving us through live, and loving us into new life was fulfilled through a person who lived and

breathed and laughed and struggled and depended on others and learned new things and experienced pleasure and suffered pain and had friends and had fun and felt purpose and questioned existence and worried about the future and found courage and fostered hope and chose joy and planted peace and loved and lost and grieved and kept going. God's Word was embodied. God's Word was enlivened. God's Word was alive in the flesh!

The God who made the universes, the galaxies, the stars, the planets, the moons, the biospheres, and the ecosystems—the great God of all the cosmos. This very God was born in a manger in the dwelling place of the livestock in the little town of Bethlehem. The God who set all these things into motion with perfect algorithms, physics, and metaphysics we are still just barely scratching the surface of understanding. This very God was born to the poor Palestinian teenager Mary. The God who dwells in eternity, who was and is and is to come. This very God was born in a colonized land to a subjugated people at the time of one of the most powerful, violent empires the world has ever known. The author of life, the creator of everything, was born in the most humble of ways to the most oppressed of human beings at the most dangerous of times. This was an *intentional incarnation of Love*.

By entering the world in this way, God met the worst of what the world had to offer. By entering the world in this way, God met the best of what Creation has to offer. A mother's Love in the face of all the systemic violence the powers and principalities could throw at her. And that mother's Love prevailed. And her son grew up and transformed the world by embodying Love. And so Love prevailed. Loved ones, every time we share that Love, we ensure that the Incarnation of Love persists and prevails. For, we become the Incarnation. We become the living Christmas story. Amen.