

9:30 – Message #1

Today is the 4th and final Sunday during the Advent Season.

Three weeks ago we looked at the Hope given to us of an everlasting life. A place where, as the Bible tells us, God will wipe away our tears and there will be no more death.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the Peace we can have in our hearts once we really, truly accept God into our lives.

Last week we looked at the Joy we can have in our lives by following the example Jesus set for us and give to others our friendship.

This morning we look at love. What love means to God.

Today is Christmas Eve – a day we do our final preparations for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

We do this in so many ways. We like to celebrate the day with gifts. Our giving to one another.

I want everyone to take a minute right now – I want each of us to take a minute and think about the greatest gift you ever received. Maybe it was a house, a car, a piece of jewelry. Or maybe it was a clay ashtray handmade from one of your kids.

Just take a minute and think about the gift.

WAIT ONE MINUTE

Okay – now that we have thought about the gift, let's take a minute and think about the person who gave you that gift. Was it a parent, a spouse, a child or a friend?

Take a minute and think about the person who gave you that gift.

WAIT ONE MINUTE

There is a pretty good chance that the person who gave you that gift – the one that is the best gift you have ever received – that they planned it and gave it to you out of love. Out of knowing you and what you wanted, or needed, or desired.

Take a minute right now and think about the thought, and the planning, and the love that person must have had for you to give you that gift.

WAIT ONE MINUTE

Sometimes good gifts need some decent planning. And that planning can get very involved.

Like the Christmas gift I was planning for my wife this year. She has been wanting to go on a cruise with me for several years now and either money wasn't right, or we were too busy or whatever the reason, it just wasn't the right time.

So about a month ago I started planning to book a cruise and surprise Shirley with the tickets on Christmas.

There is just so much planning that it involved in going on a surprise cruise.

First I had to make sure the in-laws were able to feed our cat while we were gone. Then I had to make sure we were going during a time when Shirley didn't have to work. Then I had to make sure we had all of the right documents – passports, birth certificates, and driver's licenses. I had to covertly ask her questions about destinations she would prefer, type of cruise, without her knowing I was planning on booking a cruise.

But it turned out it would just be better to let her know about it so she could prepare herself for it. It turned out to be a good thing I did as she had to take time off of work anyway – and get her passport updated. But the greatest part was the look in her eyes when I told her.

I saw Joy in her eyes at the idea of the gift. Then she had Hope that her boss would let her off. Once she found out she could get the week off, and then after her new passport was ordered – she had great Peace knowing that there was nothing to do but wait.

Then, she had the anticipation. Something wonderful to look forward to. A great gift given out of love.

And do you know how she said, “Thank You?” By volunteering to pay for half the cruise herself! I really appreciated that!

The words Noel read for us a few minutes ago were written by the prophet Micah about 750 years before Jesus was born.

It told the Jews in Israel that the Messiah, the Savior, would be born in Bethlehem. It gave them one of the signs to look for. Then we heard from the prophet Isaiah telling us another one of the signs – that a young virgin would bear a son – that his name would be Immanuel – meaning – God with us – or God here in the flesh with us.

Isaiah – 600 years before Jesus and Micah – 750 years before Jesus.

These prophets had the word from God to give Israel the hope of a Savior – a Messiah.

With anticipation they waited for the signs of the coming Messiah.

They were looking for him, but I don't think they ever fully understood what they were really getting as a gift.

Many of the Jews were looking for a great warrior to come and gather the troops and destroy their enemy. But see, to God, that would not be that great of a gift. God had a much more meaningful gift in store.

This gift he was planning was a great gift. A lot of planning went into it, a lot of thought – but mostly a lot of love.

Because what was the purpose of Jesus coming to the earth?

One purpose was so we could understand that nature of God better than we ever had. Another reason was so the Word of God could be spread beyond just the Jews, but for everyone.

But the main reason – comes to us directly out of the Bible. Many of you might be familiar with this from the Gospel of John – “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

It was more than just giving the Bible to everyone, and more than just knowing God better.

God literally gave a piece of himself – to come here to be born and then crucified so we can have everlasting life.

Let’s think about that – he literally gave a piece of himself to be brutally killed so we – you and I – could have eternal life.

That is love – and that is that type of love God has for us. We didn’t deserve this great gift – but it is a gift none the less.

And what is the best thing to do when someone gives you a great gift? Accept it and say, “Thank You”. We need to remember to say, “Thank You” to God.

We can say this by praying to God and saying thanks – but do you know what would make God really happy?

Truly accepting the gift. We shouldn't take it for granted. We should think about that gift every day – not just at Christmas. We should share the love from that gift. Jesus asked us to do two things – Love God and Love each other. That is it.

This year, this Christmas – let's reflect on that gift and not be afraid to share a piece of that love with others we come in contact with. Then, after Christmas, let's remember to continue sharing that love. Let's thank God in the way he would want us to. By always trying to show love to each other.

9:30 – Message #2

Have you ever been asked to do something that you just knew was above your ability – or you knew that there had to be someone a little more qualified to do it?

Bill Cosby once reflected that he was in the delivery room when one of his kids were born and the doctor asked him if he wanted to cut the umbilical cord. To which Cosby responded, “You want me to do it? What, am I the most qualified person here?”

Sometimes we do get asked to do things that we think someone else should be doing. I know when I get asked to do certain things that I don't feel I can handle, I'll argue with the person so they can rethink their decision.

But we just heard about a remarkable young woman.

We heard that the Angel Gabriel came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

Gabriel told her that she would be the mother of the Savior, the Messiah. Did Mary run away? Did she laugh? Did she tell him, “No Way?” Did she say, “Finally, I deserve it. I've been a good person?”

No – actually here is what she humbly said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

No excuses, no arguments, no trying to get out of it. She simply said, “if that is what the Lord wants, then so be it.”

Think about this remarkable young woman. Why did God choose her? A virgin betrothed to a young man. An Angel just came to her and told her she would be the mother of the Savior.

God knew her heart. He knew that she would be a great mother for the Son of God.

What would you do if you were in Mary's shoes? If an Angel showed up one day and said that your future son will be the Son of God – the Savior for all Mankind.

I know what I'd say, "You want me to do what?" "Who me?"

Many times in our lives we hear God asking us to do something for Him. You may have heard it called a "Calling."

Before you become a Pastor, you are required to meet with a board of ministry and tell them how you have seen God acting in your life and why you feel God has called you to become a pastor.

For myself, I felt that tugging at my heart for about 25 years before I finally did something about it and answered God. But for years I always figured it wasn't really a call to become a pastor. I mean - me? – my own mother would never have chosen me to become a pastor – let alone an all-knowing, all-seeing God.

But God knows us in ways that we don't even know ourselves. God knew Mary in ways that she didn't even know herself.

But could you imagine how hard it would be to be the mother of Jesus? When he is a small kid and reaching for the hot stove, do you say "No" to Jesus? If he goes towards it again, do you spank the "Son of God?" What pressure she must have been under.

But God knew her heart.

And you know what? God knows our hearts as well. Sure, most of us probably wouldn't be top candidates to be the parent of the Messiah – the Savior. But God does have a plan for us – we just need to stop and listen to him.

Call it a tugging at your heart, call it that “little voice” in the back of your mind – God is reaching out to all of us. Maybe not to be the “Blessed Virgin Mother”, maybe not to be a pastor, but somehow God is reaching out to you, wanting you to be a part of the kingdom of God – here – and now – today.

When we finally do listen to Him, we have to know that He will be right there and we should trust in Him.

Even Mary was surprised. As Noel read for us earlier from the Song of Mary, she said, “ For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.”

And Mary was blessed. Blessed to be the Mother of Jesus.

God called Mary and she said, “yes” – whatever my Lord wants. And for her faith, love of God – she will be known until the end of time as the Blessed Mother.

So if and when we feel God tugging at our hearts, instead of saying, “Who Me?” we can say what Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Or simply stated, “whatever you want Lord – whatever you want.”

This Christmas, let’s remember to reflect on the sacrifice God made for us with sending His only Son to us – but this year, let’s also remember that God wants to be close to all of us – whether we are a young peasant virgin, or anyone in this room – If God does try to speak to any of us, would our answer be, “Who, me?” or would it be, “Here I am.”

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