

12-19-21 Fourth Sunday in Advent: Love

Sermon- Love Deeply

Scripture- Luke 1:39-45, CTW Micah 5:2-5a

Hymns- To be selected by PK, Dave

Theme- We love to hear the story of when John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb and she responds: "Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to her." Have we thought about how deep our love should be? Realize that He makes that same statement to all of us!

Introduction:

This morning, as we wait in expectation for Christmas morning finally to be here, I want to talk about love—about what for Mary and for Elizabeth must have seemed impossible.

Our story begins with two pregnant women who, really, cannot be pregnant. The babies in their wombs are not there naturally—this is God at work. From His love, He sent Immanuel, God with us.

This is the stuff of miracles. And miracles, when received with the openness of Mary and Elizabeth, are also all about God's love for us, "for God so loved the world", has come true.

I. Love is a gift of God, and it is God.

Mary travels to see Elizabeth once she learns that they are both pregnant. No doubt Mary feels that Elizabeth can relate to her situation—and she definitely needs the support! Perhaps this is part of the reason Gabriel told her about Elizabeth.

Our text says "Mary set out and went with haste." She didn't want to waste any time, something inside her was driving her to go.

And so she arrives at Elizabeth's house, greets her, and, then, what happens? Our story tells us that when "Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb." As Elizabeth tells

Mary, **“For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.”**

Through the bond of love, Elizabeth’s child John, leapt for joy at Mary’s greeting—what one scholar calls “a miraculous expression of the emotion of the unborn child.”

And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, receives prophetic inspiration: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” And the Spirit also appears to reveal to her that Mary is indeed, as she says, “the mother of my Lord.”

She is humbled that Mary, her relative and the mother of her Lord, would visit her. Wouldn’t all of us feel humbled and intensely moved that the Lord would visit us also?

A. The intense love begins here with two women in impossible circumstances—both of them are miraculously pregnant. One was barren and past child-bearing years; and like Sarah and Hannah in the Old Testament, God provides a child despite her age and physical condition.

The child would be the last of the old covenant style prophets, heralding the fulfillment of God’s promise to send the Messiah.

The other was a virgin and at the beginning of her child-bearing years; and yet God conceived in her a child without the help of a man. And the child would be the foundation of a new covenant, the Messiah that God had long ago promised.

All children are a gift from God, and there’s nothing quite like being at the birth of your child. **Nothing quite prepares you.** When a new child enters the world, it is cause for wonder. Many people call the birth of a new child a miracle—how much more so here in this sacred story?

Both pregnancies were **impossible**. Both were **miraculous**. Both were part of God’s **plan of salvation** for mankind because of His intense love for us.

God was making clear here that it is **He** that brings new things into the world—salvation is not the result of man’s effort, but of God’s hand reaching miraculously and mysteriously into our world.

The baby in Elizabeth’s womb “**leaped for joy**” when Mary greeted her. Something wondrous was at work. Miracles were in the air. God was moving. And through it all He was showing us love.

B. Our first point is then that all love is ultimately a gift of God. It is, according to Scripture, a fruit of the Spirit, something that God brings about in the lives of those who are open and available and obedient to Him.

Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, experienced the overflowing love of God and His providence for her. Her child felt it too.

And Mary, if we were to keep reading, also rejoiced at what God was doing: “**My spirit rejoices**,” she says, “in God my Savior.” Rejoicing is simply our love directed toward God in worship.

In the Gospel of John Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person must be **born again or born from above**, that they must be born of both water and Spirit.

Historically, images of birth surround the message of salvation—the births of John and Jesus and, eventually, the **new birth** of those who submit to Jesus and his message.

This reminds me of the opening lyrics of a hymn by Stuart Townsend:

When Love came down to earth And made His home with men,
The hopeless found a hope, The sinner found a friend.
Not to the powerful but to the poor He came,
And humble, hungry hearts Were satisfied again.

So love has at its very source, God Himself, and here the source of love is specifically the coming of the Messiah into the world, and the joy in being a part of the events that surround this coming.

II. Love is usually accompanied by challenges.

A. Love never reaches us however completely unadulterated. Love is always mixed with adversity, struggle, and difficulty. To truly understand love one has to understand the sorrow of being without love.

Mary certainly knew the joy of being used by God. But she also knew, more than likely, a degree of social stigma. Having an illegitimate child was not cause for celebration in Jewish culture; rather, it was often cause for stoning.

And no doubt Mary was unsure of what having to raise and rear the Messiah would be like. But yet she willingly followed God's call and was obedient.

To know love, we too have to be willing to **sacrifice** as Mary did, to **obey** as she did, and to **submit** herself to God as she did.

Sometimes God calls us to do things that we never would imagine would lead to love in our lives. **Someone has said that love is the by-product of obedience, and it certainly was for Mary and Elizabeth.**

B. Our second point is this: love is usually accompanied by challenges. If love is first and foremost something that we receive from God's gracious hand because we are available and prepared (even if we don't realize it!) like Mary, then when God calls us to something that will elicit love in our hearts **we can be sure that we will face challenges just as Mary did.**

When God calls us to do something, and we do it and obey and face challenges as a result, and He helps us through it; **that is as a result of love...a product of love.**

It's a joy deeper than what the world gives—because it enables us to face life and sustains us through challenges we face.

III. Love is something we share as the Bond of the People of God.

And isn't it interesting that God chose Mary and Elizabeth to bear these children? Isn't it interesting that he chose two women who were related?

As we said before, no doubt this would make it easier on each of them. They could share their experiences and go through this together. It meant that neither of them was alone with their unusual circumstances.

A. It also meant that they could experience real love—there is a joy when you know that you are not alone, a deep-seated joy that comes from friendship and fellowship, and love. And we also love it when we know that we are a part of God's plan and fulfilling the purpose he has for us.

Both Elizabeth and Mary had unique and specific roles in God's plan. Both would give birth to a son, each of whom had a destiny and a call on their lives.

One was infinitely greater than the other, but God chose both of them. Elizabeth and Mary would ultimately be called to share the joy of having these sons with others.

Ultimately, both sons would be killed because of the role they would fulfill in God's plan. John would be beheaded for **speaking** the truth; Jesus would be crucified for **being** the Truth.

But neither Mary nor Elizabeth could contain the love they felt. Both had to share it with one another as soon as possible.

And ultimately they would have to share it with the world. **The same should be true for us.**

The love we know is a love we share. And the funny thing is, sharing the love doesn't mean we have less but more. Love increases the more you give it away.

So, if you do know the love of the Lord, know also that when you share it, when you give it away, that this will only increase your love.

Have you shared your love recently? Have you asked the Lord to help you light a candle of love in someone else's heart? What a great reason to **share!**

IV. Conclusion: When was the Last Time You Could Not Contain the Love You Felt for Something or Someone?

A. Are you willing to face the challenges that a life with God will bring if it means knowing an impossible love, a love that only God can bring into your life?

I pray that you do know the love of the Lord this season "for the love of the Lord is your strength."

I hope that your love isn't limited to what you find in your stocking and under the tree. I hope that your love amounts to more than all the good food you eat.

I hope your love is deeper than even the love you know with family and friends.

And that is my prayer for all of us this Christmas: **that we will all know incredible love,** for that is the love that only God can bring.

Amen? Let Us Pray...