

Sunday, December 18, 2022 Advent 4 *"He is Born"*

Isaiah 7:10-16 Romans 9:1-7 Matthew 1:18-25

We're getting closer to the Big Day! It is the 4th Sunday of Advent and we give thanks because of the love we receive in Jesus Christ! But how do we understand the depth of God's love as we wait and prepare during this Advent season in which we have been focusing on the Joy that Jesus' birth brings! Just what is so amazing about Jesus' birth? We often get excited when we hear about someone who has had a baby in these days filled with uncertainty. Babies are born every day. We pray and hope that they are healthy and will gain weight appropriately; that as they grow older they reach the milestones set before them by children as they too grew older. As these babies move into becoming little boys or girls- their personalities emerge and there is just a lot of love invested in them and their future for who they are- human beings.

In Isaiah 7 we read of the prophecy about a woman who would bear a son and name him Immanuel- God with us. This boy would choose the good and through him the people would be saved. Immanuel spelled with either an E or an I, means God with us but what does with us really signify?

To reflect upon Mary and Joseph and the circumstances of Jesus' birth we need to understand what is meant in these simple words, "He is born". The infant boy named Jesus is born into a human experience. We don't know the exact date when Jesus was born but we do know that at some point it was recorded that a baby boy was born to Mary and Joseph of Nazareth in the town of Bethlehem. This is recorded history and this means that Jesus came into the world like other babies—Mother Mary giving birth in labour and pain in childbirth with Joseph and prayerfully other women around her as she experiences the wonder of giving birth. Hearing the baby's first cry after taking in its first breath of life. This baby was born but as we realize later on, he was not just any baby. He was and is the son of God. God in human form; made flesh, incarnation of Christ.

This is important to our understanding as faithful people who believe in God and have put our faith in Him. Jesus is God's Son; the Word made flesh and by his human existence he changed the course of world history. But what does incarnation mean? It is a church word

which has nothing to do with flowers. What it means is meat or flesh- carne as in chicken con carne or chili con carne means chili with meat and has the same root as carnivore—one who eats meat! Therefore when Jesus was born he was the incarnation that is the in flesh of God. This is what is at the heart of Christianity. Why did all powerful, knowing, seeing God, come to live as a weak, restricted, individual with limited input? Why did the Creator of all things subject themselves to the rules they imposed on their creation through the results of the sin of human beings? To understand this is to understand Christianity and the depth of God's love for us. This is at the heart of our Christian faith- Love.

Why a human baby which we know is totally dependent on its mother and this human baby Jesus did not have any special powers or features- no tails, horns, voices, super vision, increased running speed or growth/sentience. At the time of Jesus' birth, his life expectation to age 5 was very low given the circumstances of where he lived and the social status of his family. Jesus was born into a poor family—why didn't God choose him to be a son of a pharaoh, king, ruler or even a leader in power in the synagogue—not his father was a carpenter. As a new baby, Jesus was going to face many challenges and this was duly noted- as he laid in a manger in a stable near an inn.

But somehow over 2000 years later we still hang up tinsel and garland, put up a tree and get out nativity sets to remind us of where Jesus' life began. None of the kings who ruled at that time nor any time have left their dynasties or kingdoms intact. Rome is gone, Israel has been built up and broken down many times and the entire world's political landscape has changed dozens of times even in the last 230 years. We still celebrate this day—the day Jesus was born. It must be important to last this long- when we think of the generations of people who paused and reflected on that baby born of Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and who lived a human life.

Jesus was raised in a Jewish home spoke well, learned like other boys. He played, scraped knees, wept, laughed shared meals, ate fish a lot and probably banged his fingers a few times with hammers. And most of all he experienced love. Love the focus of this 4th Sunday of Advent. Love which is defined in seven ways by the Greeks and causes many relationships to

have difficulties because it is not always clear what we mean when we love others. Yet Jesus knew how to share, show and teach love. And love is what made the incarnation possible. God loved the world- his creation- that he came to us as Jesus to see and experience being human. Jesus learned how to live a human life filled with ups and downs and he taught us how to love. Love that was so strong that we are pulled back to Him. This is Christianity- God's coming to us in love which is a deep love beyond physical and mental attributes. The Greek '*agape*' comes close because it is a love that God has for us which saves us from ourselves. It is a love that is personal and not a distant voice. This love comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ because he was a person- a human and he knew and understood what love was. And He still does. He understands our struggles-as a poor person he still helped those in need, and he looked beyond their social state and saw who each person was and saw them hurting.

"Love came down at Christmas" is a poem written by Christina Georgina Rossetti in 1885 as a testimony of her faith. It later was set to different hymn tunes still somewhat popular because Rossetti's use of LOVE.

*1 Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign.*

She is referring to Jesus coming from heaven and it was the star which shone brightly and the angels who sang that gave out the information that this baby love Himself was special.

*2 Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus, but wherewith for sacred sign?*

Rossetti describes God as "Father, Son, and "Holy Spirit"-the Trinity, and that the Son came to live on earth as human but from God. And then asks the question for a sacred sign of who He is.

*3 Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign. (Hymn book 422)*

Rossetti adds that "Love" is going to be the savior of all the human race. This love is everything to everyone all the time. And this Love we now call Immanuel, or Jesus will belong to all people if we believe. This Jesus will allow them to love not just God, but one another as well. Jesus came into the world for "all men/people". It is both a "gift and sign" of what was to come. But we must believe that this Love is Jesus. To Rossetti, Love in Christ was at the center of religion itself and it should be ours as well.

But how are we to share and show our love? How do we wrap it up and give it away? It is easy- this is why we share our gifts, whether tangible or intangible; whether edible or not or even whether virtual or real. When we think about how we share our love do we hold the truths of Christ within our hearts because of faith? OR are we sharing love in Christ with others at all?

As we look to the Advent wreath- the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love have been offered to us, all we need to do is to share the story of Christ's incarnation, that is his coming to the human world as a baby. This is God's love wrapped up in a bow and placed in a manger for us. And when we take this to heart, this is when Christmas becomes Christmas for each of us. God Immanuel Christ Jesus- this is the Advent of our Joy- when Christ shall come and we can shout with joy that HE is born for us and dwells within us through faith. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

Holy God bless us as we experience love- from you, to us in Jesus; and for each of us with each other. Help us to know LOVE as given to us in Jesus the Christ, the baby in the manger and the One who changed history for us all. The Advent of Jesus is love incarnate. Enable us to prepare with open hearts and minds. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.