

**SUNDAY December 21, 2025      “Because of Bethlehem...Cradle Cross Crown”**

**Isaiah 7:10-14    Philippians 2:5-11    Matthew 1:18-25**

We are getting closer to the day; it's the Fourth Sunday of the season of Advent and we are almost ready to celebrate Jesus' birth into human history! All four candles on the outer ring of the Advent wreath are lit and it is with love that we can prepare to welcome Jesus like the shepherds did so long ago.

Christmas is a time to love-- but one would not know this If you read the news headlines from around the world. Mass killings on a beach in Australia while lighting the menorah; more killed in a university setting; people being deported back to their own country where people are starving; ongoing struggles continue between nations over a small plot of land. And people cannot sit down face to face to talk openly and in a manner that reflects our true humanity. That is the manner or way of love that Christ taught to all who would believe.

Just think for a minute to that scene in the barn when Mary and Joseph are in the upmost moments of joy with the safe delivery of Jesus. From heaven to earth Jesus came to live and breathe as a human infant. IT was not too much later when shepherds 'fresh' from the fields and their sheep are at the entry of the barn and want to draw closer- to see this thing which has happened. Mary could have been mean, nasty, angry, hungry or all of the above. She had just given birth to a baby- and now strangers want to see him? What did they expect him to look like? Or what did they know about him? Were they expecting something more? The shepherds just wanted to see- to be witnesses to the story the angels told them. They watched in awe and wonder and sought answers to their faith and in these moments. Very precious moments when parents meet their child for the first time and what they experience is instant love.

But Joseph wasn't always in favour of this whole marriage to Mary. She had told him she was expecting a child- but he knew it was not his. He wanted to not marry this young woman and had in mind to walk away from her. But this was not to be.. God sent an angel to him in a dream. The angel told him in a dream that it is ok to take Mary as your wife; the child is from God. The baby is a boy and you are to name him Jesus for this is his purpose in living a human life. He will save his people. One can only imagine Joseph wandering around in the morning confused uncertain and needing to verify the truth on this matter. So he went to Mary and told her they would marry as the angel told him to do. Mary too was probably upset about Joseph's predicament and just reassured him again and again that the baby would be the Saviour.

How much did Joseph love Mary? Probably a whole lot- who else would believe that an angel spoke and told him the story. He did do so and then they had to go and register for

Caesar in order to be properly taxed! What a way to begin a marriage-- and then have the baby born far away from home! And they came out of this situation stronger than before and their love would have grown too as

This week we focus on the love that is given and received by God through his gift to us in Jesus. But what evidence of this love is there in our world today-- Not only are their difficulties in specific countries there are also problems being experienced by all communities of faith as the general population rises, fewer people are involved in any mosque, church or synagogue. A simple explanation is that we know Christ's story well enough that we just do not have any reason to worship God or to do so with others. But those who are faithful followers and attend services, know the story in general ways, but also realize that they are not perfect and nothing will be until and unless Christ enters their life and they are changed!

Yet when people come to church and to see how Christ changes lives by living in his way, we too can see Christ Jesus in others. The Apostle Paul seldom appears in Christmas reflections. Yet Paul's words give an eloquent summary of God's promise to the world about this baby in the cradle. Yet Paul does not leave him in the manger, but refers to JEsus as the one who rose from death and ascended to heaven and the one who reigns.

We are to love like Christ in all the relationships we have, that is, to have the same mindset as Jesus. We read that Jesus: *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!* This is God's divine intervention for the people new to faith and following Jesus to seek humility. Jesus was in very nature God.- Before Jesus was born into human history- he was with and is God. HE created all things as Creator-- Yet, Jesus is known as the Christ, the Incarnate One. That is, the One who made everything and made himself nothing. He became human- to depend on air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink. He had to crawl, walk stand; wash and dress just like everyone else in human history. HE became human to serve us. As Max Lucado writes in "Because of Bethlehem" Jesus entered the world not to demand our allegiance but to display his affection. He displayed his affection so much, that he was willing to die for your sake. HE could have done anything to combat those who mocked him, spat on him, called him crazy, or different. But he did not. He fulfilled the promise of God to be the Saviour and to do this he moved from that manger to a cross. IF this isn't love for others then I do not know what is?

Jesus was born of Mary and eventually died on the cross and entered a tomb. But as Paul continues this was not the end of Jesus. Because Christ rose from death and rose to new life and eventually ascended to when he had come from. *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (vs9-11))*

There is only One Jesus Christ and at His name everyone who has faith and believes in Him as Saviour should be bowing in awe and wonder. Jesus left heaven, and became human for our sakes. Yet as he taught others to love, he was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. His way was different than other teachings. Yet His way is the holy way of God. Jesus faced death because he loved people and wanted them and all through the generations what we hear today. Jesus is the one who wears the crown and reigns as Saviour, and Lord of all. But we need to recognize him as this. Emmanuel God with us- yes, but also Saviour and King who reigns. This is our purpose as a church- to make disciples of Christ Jesus who will then teach others to love as Jesus did. This is the call we follow: Come to God and believe, be reconciled in faith and have hope in God.

Jesus was buried and rose again so that everyone will realize that Emmanuel- God with us- is still with us and will be forevermore. But we must believe, acknowledge Christ and know that out of love, God sent His Son to show and share His love. Out of love we are to share and show to others our love for Christ Jesus. WE receive the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love all bundled up in an infant born in a stable, Because of Bethlehem.

Song: "Because of Bethlehem" by Matthew West