

## **Church of the Divine Love**

### **Sermon fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020**

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16; Psalm 89: 1-4, 19-26; Romans 16: 25-27; Luke 1: 26-38

#### **Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,**

On this fourth and last Sunday of the season of Advent, we focus on the last of the four themes that we are focusing on this Advent season, namely hope, peace, joy, and love. And this Sunday therefore, we focus on the theme of love in preparation for Christmas. As we all know, love is the most important of all Christian virtues, and is in fact the very reason why we have Christmas in the first place.

For without love, there would not have been Christmas and all of its celebrations and joy. Consequently, there would not have been hope for all of us mankind, and joy would have been dimmed and out of reach for us, because God's love has not manifested among us. But thanks to God's enduring love for each and every one of us, the love of God has been manifested in none other than His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. This has been clearly stated to us, in what the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus the Pharisee in one of the most well-known phrases in the entire Scriptures, from the Gospel of St. John, chapter 3, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave us His only beloved Son, so that all who believe in Him may not perish but have eternal life.' And this is in essence, what Christmas and all of its joy is all about, a celebration of God's ultimate love for us.

That is why, after reflecting in the past three Sundays on the aspects of hope, peace, and joy that Christmas has brought us and which we will celebrate again very soon, it is timely that on this last Sunday of Advent before the time of Christmas that we look into the very core of the Christmas celebration itself, the love of God made Man, the love of God coming to dwell among us in Christ. And this is what the Scripture passages today have delivered to us, in the fulfilment of God's long promised salvation, beginning from the encounter between the prophet Isaiah and king Ahaz of Judah, in which the prophet Isaiah prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, clearly speaking of how the Messiah would come, through the sign of the Virgin bearing a Child, the One through Whom God would dwell among His people, 'Emmanuel', meaning 'God is with us'.

At the time of the prophet Isaiah and afterwards, as our Advent claim is that God is right here with us, as God was with Mary. The first thing the angel, Gabriel, says to Mary is "The Lord is with you." And then he says, "Do not be afraid." Gabriel assured Mary that God was with her, but little did she know how close, how real, and how vulnerable the God she would bear was willing to become. People waited for the coming of the Messiah, the true meaning of those words in the prophecy of Isaiah was not fully understood, and it was only then, when the Archangel Gabriel came to Nazareth, upon a young woman and virgin betrothed to the local carpenter, Mary, the one who was destined to be the Mother of God and Savior, that the fullness of God's intentions was made bare to all. If God has loved us with so much love, and therefore brought us new hope, peace, and joy through Christmas, then should we not then show the same love to one another? This is what in essence we need to do in our Christmas celebrations, brothers, and sisters in Christ. We must celebrate the love, not the gifts; rejoice with our brothers and sisters; love and forgive one another for anything that we have caused hurt to each other

instead of being jealous or trying to overtake each other in how we celebrate; reach out and share our joy and love rather than keeping all the joy to ourselves.

Our Advent claim is that God is right here with us. And God is with Mary. The first thing the angel, Gabriel, says to Mary is "The Lord is with you." And then he says, "Do not be afraid."

Madeleine L'Engle describes the birth of Christ in a messy world in a way that wows me every time I hear it:

He did not wait till the world was ready, till people and nations were at peace. He came when the Heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release. He did not wait for the perfect time. He came when the need was deep and great. In the mystery of the Word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born. We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice, for to share our grief, to touch our pain, He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Year after year we gather to hear the story of Jesus' birth even when all the world is not sane. We raise our songs throughout Advent with joyful voice because although we know sorrow and despair and uncertainty, Love has been birthed into the messiness of our world, right into the middle of it. So, if it seems hard to live into the joy of Christmas this year because of the heavy burdens you bear, or the messiness of your life or your family, or the pain of being physically distanced from those we love; know this: God does not wait. God does not wait until the world is ready or for a perfect time or for perfect peace. God does not wait for pandemics to end. God does not wait for all the messes to be tidied up. God does not wait because "Jesus is being born where people need him most." God makes God's home in the messiest of places, a stable, in the messiest of times, under the control of the Roman Empire, and with the most ordinary of people, a teenage girl and her fiancé and the shepherds. Jesus is being born where we need him most. In the hard places. In the dark and desperate places. In the lonely and lost places. In the places and with the people who seem too far gone. Jesus is born into exactly those kinds of places and he spends his life with the most vulnerable and ostracized and brokenhearted of people.

May God continue to love us all as He has always done, and bless us all in our good endeavors, and may He help us all to prepare ourselves heart, mind, and soul for the coming joy of Christmas that we may celebrate it well, and not to forget to share the love and joy we have with one another, especially with those who had no chance to celebrate. May God bless our Advent preparations for Christmas. And today, despite the messes that surround us and the pain we feel, we know that God has become one of us and is in the middle of the mess with us. And so, we raise our songs with joyful voice, for Love has come. And for this, we say, thanks be to God. Love has come. **AMEN**