On this final Sunday of the season of Advent, we lit the fourth candle reminding us God’s wish and commandment for humanity – LOVE – to love God and to love one another, as much as we love ourselves. Christmas is God’s Valentine’s Day for humanity, as the concept of LOVE is manifested through God’s ultimate love by the sending of His very own into this world as *the Word became flesh and dwelled among us*.[[1]](#footnote-1) It’s God’s way of saying to humanity, that “I still love you, in spite of…” This message serves as the foundation of our faith and it’s worth reminding ourselves each year. In God’s ultimate act of giving, as he shares this LOVE with us even when we have squandered and neglected God’s LOVE in the past.

In the all familiar LOVE passage of 1st Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul described this LOVE as the ultimate human expression. “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but **do not have LOVE**, I am [nothing but] a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but **do not have LOVE**, I am nothing.[[2]](#footnote-2) ALL is meaningless if we do not have LOVE for one another.

Last week, we read about how Mary took center stage as she lamented and rejoiced by the angel’s announcement that she would physically conceive and bear a child…but this was no ordinary child, he was the Son of God. What a honor…but also a scary proposition that this unwedded teenager was going to be the bearer of God’s Son. Let’s just pause here and think about this for a moment. How in the world is still possible? But it’s true. It’s what makes this a radical miracle and a mystery of LOVE between God and humanity.

This week, we shift our focus on the other side of this rather complicated and mysterious situation that all of a sudden, this engaged young couple found themselves in. As we read earlier from *Matthew*, Joseph also offered his ultimate LOVE for his engaged fiancée Mary. The angel of the LORD appeared to Joseph in a series of dreams, reassuring him that it’s OK. It’s OK to take Mary on as his wife. This was all part of God’s mission of LOVE for humanity.

Joseph, who was also probably another teenager, or perhaps in his 20’s, made the biggest decision of his life by agreeing to take on this monumental risk and commitment not only of himself but of Mary and this child who was not even his. Joseph, the carpenter, demonstrated a great deal of maturity and faith as well. He could have easily walked away and wanted no part of this whatsoever of Mary. Joseph had every right to call off their engagement, severe any ties with Mary, and leave her completely out in the dark – pregnant and without a husband. According to the law, Mary could even be stoned to death for committing an act of adultery. But Joseph wasn’t going to let that happen to Mary, because he loved her. He was **“a righteous man and was unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace.” Technically Joseph was the legal and spiritually adopted father of Jesus, even though he was NOT the biological father. But come to think of it, aren’t we all spiritually adopted by our heavenly Father anyway. God was willing to take us in because of His unconditional, radical, and ultimate LOVE for us!**

As we re-read this birth narrative, we come to realize that the Son of God came into our human world under the most unusual, and the most unexpected circumstances. The actual birth event of the Christ-child may not happen the way as we know it…or at least the way we have dramatized or fixated on our mind over the years. It may NOT be the “perfect” Christmas settings that many of us might seem to be familiar with, as we see on the Christmas cards or the Christmas pageant.

But regardless of how we imagine what actually took place, since none of us were there in person to witness this special occasion, **let us not get so caught up with the facts and details, but instead on the cause and the reasons.** The story of the birth of Christ does, however, call for us to embrace Christ’s presence among us…Emmanuel – God with us! The fact that God sent His very own to us, due to the depravity of our sins. There is this irrevocable separation between God and humanity and Jesus was the only one who is worthy and qualified to fill that gap among us! **It is part of God’s perfect plan for a sinful humanity in this imperfect world.**

Furthermore, we must come to realize that **God’s plan is much bigger than our own.**  The young couple Mary and Joseph probably had their dreams and hopes derailed when the angels visited them, on separate occasions, announcing what was about to take place. It is through this Divine intervention that God stepped in and interrupted their hopes and dreams and altered the course of human history once and for all. God had chosen both Mary and Joseph, and they both said YES to God! *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."*[[3]](#footnote-3)

Despite all the planning and effort in all that we do, we may want to create the most perfect Christmas to welcome Christ’s coming, only to be surprised by God with an alternate plan, when God steps in and surprises us all. What hopes and dreams might we have but only to be intervened by God? Are we as obedient as Mary and Joseph in adhering to God’s carefully choreographed instructions and plans, or do we set things into motions through our own human effort and asking God to comply along with our plans.

From the Old Testament passage that we read earlier from *Isaiah*, we caught a glimpse of how God’s LOVE for humanity remained steadfast throughout the generations. God had given us a sign*, a young woman would be with child and she shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.* God accepted us just as we are, even when we may not have been the most faithful and have fallen short of God’s grace from time to time. God’s ultimate LOVE and desire of us to reconcile this broken relationship by sending us His Son Jesus Christ.

Like Mary and Joseph, when WE are in a dire, confused, and desperate situation, as we cry out for God’s help, and God hears us and chooses to remains with us, and God chose to stay close by our side. As Jesus declared, *“remain in me, as I remain in you.**Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Christ’s ultimate wish for us was to “love one another” and to honor God’s love through ALL of humanity. God’s ultimate message of LOVE would not only sustain us during these weeks of the Advent season, but continues to resonate in our hearts throughout the rest of our lives. **Christmas does not happen only during this time of the year. It happens whenever God’s love is expressed and embraced across all humankind. God’s ultimate gift of LOVE keeps on giving.**

Even long after these candles’ flames have been extinguished, the flame of the Holy Spirit will continue to radiate through the lives that we’ve touched and impacted. What ultimate contribution of LOVE are we making to humanity today? What legacy of LOVE are we sustaining and leaving behind?

Friends, God has given us this “ultimate love” and a missional challenge to carry on this legacy of God’s LOVE until Christ returns once again. May we continue to seek this Messiah Child joyfully and expectedly throughout this season of Advent. **May we rise to the occasion and respond to those who are desperately seeking God’s grace and LOVE, in their quests for human LOVE.** In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 1:14* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *I Corinthians 13:1-2* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 1:38* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *John 15:4-5* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)