This time of the year, many parents would take their children to the mall or department stores not only to go shopping but to have their photos taken with Santa Claus. One of my friends did just that last weekend with her two children. Taking photo with Santa has become their annual pre-Christmas family tradition ever since her children were like 4-5 years old. Surprisingly they’ve kept up with this tradition for the last 10 years in a row. That’s right….10 years! Both of her kids are now teenagers and beginning to feel a bit embarrassed standing next to Santa and posing for pictures (as you can see here). No more sitting on Santa’s lap as they’ve become too big or perhaps too embarrassed in front of other kids much younger than they are.

What’s funny though is that over the years they have developed this special bonding relationship with Santa. He’s like part of their family now. Well, you can’t really blame them. After all, it is the same person playing Santa all these years. Now that’s something special for this Santa seeing how the kids have grown over the years….and they keep coming back for more. As customary, each year Santa would ask the children the same question…*“What are your wishes for Christmas this year?”* Usually the children would pause and think about their answers. Some would ask for special toys, a pair of sneakers or some electronics gadgets, while some may have a grander plan wishing for **“peace on earth, good health and good will for all humankind”** or things of that nature.

But as we all know, not all requests or wishes made to Santa can be fulfilled. Some kids might feel disappointed when they do NOT get what they had wished for. If YOU have a chance to tell Santa some of your wishes right now, what might they be?

On this final Sunday of the Advent season, we lit the fourth Advent candle representing God’s wish for humanity – LOVE. This LOVE is not our wishes to God but instead, it is God’s wishes for us that we LOVE one another. This LOVE is made manifested through God’s sending of His own son into this world as *the Word became flesh and dwelled among us*.[[1]](#footnote-1) In God’s ultimate act of giving, God shares this LOVE with us even when we have betrayed God and squandered God’s LOVE due to our own human sinfulness.

Just as we read earlier from our gospel passage according to Matthew, Joseph stood firm of his vow and love to the woman whom he was engaged to - Mary. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Joseph in a dream, Joseph was just as terrified just as Mary was. *“WHAT!?! You want me to do what? What do you mean, Mary is pregnant? By who? How?!? You want me to be the earthly stepfather of this illegitimate son that’s to be born of Mary? Do you have any idea what this might to do my reputation? Either way, I’m in a no-win situation, if I stay with Mary or if I secretly divorce her? But I can’t to that to her…because I LOVE her!”*

Joseph, who was also probably another teenager, 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 own.

Come to think of it, Joseph could have easily walked away and wanted no part whatsoever of Mary. It was all within Joseph’s authority to break off the engagement, severe all ties with Mary, and leave her completely out in the dark as a pregnant teenaged mother and without a husband. Mary could even be stoned to death according to the law for committing an act of adultery, but according to Matthew, Joseph was **“a righteous man and unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace.”**

Joseph reaffirmed his pledge to stay with Mary and honored Mary’s wishes to fulfill God’s plan upon her. *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"[[2]](#footnote-2)* as Mary proclaimed to the angels.

As we re-read this birth narrative of God’s entry into the world in human form, we come to realize that the Son of Man came into our human world under the most unusual, unexpected, and the most exotic circumstances. Many things do not quite make any sense whatsoever. The actual birth of Christ event did not happen the way as we know it…or as WE have shaped it to be. It was NOT the “perfect” Christmas settings that we see on the Christmas cards or the Christmas pageant as we know it.

The story of the birth of Christ isn’t about what we’ve envisioned what Christmas should be. It is, however, about allowing our hearts and our minds to fully embrace Christ’s presence just as what things may appear to be and just as we are. **Christmas is not something that we planned because after all, it is never about us but it’s ALL about God! It is part of God’s perfect plan for a sinful humanity in an imperfect world.**  **No matter how hard we try to resist from the secularization of Christmas, it appears that the only viable and logical thing that we can plan for the coming of Christ…is our hearts! Just as we sing and prepare to receive the greatest JOY to the world….*let every hearts prepare Him room! And let Heaven and Nature sing!***

Furthermore, we must come to realize that **God’s plan is much bigger than our own.**  Joseph and Mary probably had their plans to get marry and eventually start a family, but maybe not right away. But something happened. Yeah…God happened! There was a Divine intervention as God stepped in and interrupted their plans and their lives, in the most unconventional way. God had chosen both Mary and Joseph, and they both said YES to God!

This only goes to show that 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. It may not be the best plan, as we see it, but it is God’s plan nevertheless. As part of OUR response to God’s calling, we must humbly lay aside our human prides and personal ambitions and let the Spirit lead us and rule in our lives once again.

**Christ may not be conceived by the traditional biological means, born in the royal palace, at the most peaceful time, or by the most perfect earthly mother and father, nevertheless, Christ entered into this world in the most unusual circumstances in the midst of fears, terrors, and even scandals.** It was definitely NOT the most picturesque Christmas scene as we would humanly orchestrated, but that’s exactly how God’s plan works and not ours.

As we read from the prophet Isaiah, God’s mind 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 did not waver His plan upon whether we have been “naughty or nice”. God accepted us just as we are, even when we may not have been most faithful to God and have fallen short of God’s grace. It is still God’s ultimate wish for us to reconcile this broken relationship by sending us His Son Jesus Christ.

Without Joseph standing up and protecting her, Mary could’ve been ridiculed and ostracized by their community. Joseph honored his commitment and his ultimate love to Mary by staying with her and not abandoning her. He exercised his ministry of presence during a time when Mary needed him the most.

In the same way, 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.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Jesus’s ultimate wish for us before He ascended to be with His Father 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 it continues to resonate in our hearts throughout the rest of our lives. 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 wish” 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. *Luke 1:38* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *John 15:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)