

WEEK :3

LOVE – THE ADVENT OF JESUS

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born in England in 1830 to a family steeped in the arts. Her father, Gabriele Rossetti, a religious exile from Italy and professor of Italian at King's College, London, developed several debilitating illnesses as well as dementia when Gabriele was only a child. Faced with financial troubles, Christina's mother became the primary breadwinner, leaving Christina often home alone where the isolation gave way to deep depression and a nervous breakdown that pulled her out of school. She suffered poor health from her teens on but found a deep sustaining faith in the church and Scripture, and an abiding joy through writing. In her late teens and twenties, she was courted by three serious suiters but declined each one for religious reasons. Rather than romance, she devoted her days to teaching and maintaining a school started by her mother. Her later life would be plagued with health struggles and depression until she died in 1894. However, throughout her life she wrote prolifically with profound religious themes in fiction, non-fiction, and much poetry. Her poem, "Love Came Down at Christmas," published at Christmas, 1885, is based on 1 John 4:7-11 and reflects the simplicity of God's love and the story of the Gospel.

Only one word in the short three-verse work is more than two syllables, "incarnate." May the simple, incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ be yours this Christmas.

Love Came Down at Christmas

By Christina Georgina Rossetti

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?

ADVENT READING PLAN 2021

Love shall be our token;
Love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Sunday, December 12

John 1:14-18

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE WORD BECOMES FLESH

Kim Huffman

I have three biological children, and when they were born, they came out as separate, wholly other persons. Though knit together by God using the DNA strands of my husband and me, never once as a mom did I feel like they came into this world to make me or my husband known. But that's exactly what God did when Jesus was born.

John says the Word, the Logos or "divine utterance" of God, became flesh. John gives deeper insight into the mystery of a triune God by explaining that this Word made flesh came not only as human, but in the fullness of God. John goes on to say that the God who had never been seen, was made known through Jesus Christ. God did this so that He could dwell or "tabernacle" among us in close and intimate communion.

Take a moment and sit with Jesus. Reflect on who He is – the Word made flesh, the very fullness of God. Then, reflect on why He came – to have an intimate relationship with you.

Monday, December 13

Luke 1:5-25

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE ANGEL VISITS ZECHARIAH

Dan Huffman

Like many, I do most of my Christmas shopping online. With Christmas now only 12 days away, we must pay special attention to shipping times. Thankfully, websites send a tracking number once your items have shipped. You can then check this number to see when your package will arrive. That should be enough assurance that your gifts will arrive in time.

In our Bible reading today, Zechariah gets a highly-personalized tracking number when the angel, Gabriel, appears and tells him that a precious package is on the way – his only son, John. But this was not enough for Zechariah. He asked Gabriel, “How can I be sure of this?” Zechariah asked for more evidence and Gabriel granted that request by declaring that Zechariah would not be able to speak until the day his son arrived. Oh snap!

I can relate to Zechariah. I am wired to ask, “How can I be sure?” I believe this is a trust issue. Maybe people have let you down. Maybe your Christmas gifts did not arrive when promised. Whatever has caused your lack of trust, it is not fair to project human failures onto God. When God makes promises, He always keeps them! His timing may not always line up with our timing, but God’s timing is best.

As we focus on the arrival of Jesus; the greatest Christmas gift, remember mankind waited a long time for Him to arrive. But Jesus did arrive, and He demonstrated God’s love by taking the punishment for our failings on the cross. All of this was done in God’s glorious timing.

That track record should give us enough assurance that God will continue to keep His promises.

Take time today to reflect on the great gift of Jesus and God’s perfect timing in your life.

Tuesday, December 14

Luke 1:26-28

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE ANGEL VISITS MARY

Wally Marshall

The Lord is with you! These are not just words, but the actions of the Creator of all, including all life. Mary, being greeted by an angel (which might sound a bit scary to you and me) was greatly troubled. But the angel said to her, “do not be afraid.”

Mary wondered, how can it be that I am a virgin and the angel said that I will carry in my womb the hope of the world and name him Jesus? But that is exactly what the angel proclaimed.

Have you ever been in the presence of an angel? What would your response be to the presence of God that was both visible and touchable?

I have had two occasions that I vividly remember as times when my pure faith was met with God’s presence, an angel-like experience. Two individuals that I believe were right there when I needed a boost of faith to keep me going. I can’t explain how deeply these tangible expressions of God’s amazing love for me would affect my ministry life.

Today, reflect on times in your life when God showed up and reinforced your faith. If you need reinforcing today, ask Him to show up and strengthen your faith this season.

Wednesday, December 15

Luke 1:39-45

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: MARY AND ELIZABETH

Pete Sutton

What love we see in Elizabeth for her young relative, Mary. Elizabeth opened much more than her home to care for Mary in the final months of her pregnancy. She has opened her heart to share in the joy of Jesus, the blessed child she would bear. She opened her mind to believe in the promise of God to be fulfilled through the mother of her Lord. She was floored at the favor she received that God would grant her such a privileged proximity to the Messiah and the vessel who carried him. Elizabeth is the exemplar of what it looks like to receive Jesus with affection and surrender. In fact, her reception is so thorough that she becomes a fount of God's blessing – reciprocating the blessing that Mary brings into her home.

This Christmas, may we be found with such openness, love, affection, and surrender.

Today, reflect on the day Jesus first entered your life. Take time to reflect on the many ways you've opened your life to Him and the many ways you might still surrender that God may make you a fount of His blessing to all you meet.

Thursday, December 16

Luke 1:57-66

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ryan Worsley

John the Baptist would certainly be regarded as one of the best-known characters in all the Bible. A relative of Jesus, John preached, taught, and baptized many (ultimately, even Jesus). Yet, the Bible tells us that John was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. John had a following, and some wondered if he might be the promised Messiah. He might have been tempted to really make a name for himself. However, John went to great lengths to deflect any personal attention and clearly point people to Jesus. Out of love, John embraced his calling.

Could the same be said of you today? Do you live your life in such a way as to point people to Jesus?

God, in the busyness of this season, please help us show the love of Christ. Give us the grace to speak with kindness, to treat others with dignity and respect and, ultimately, to point people to You. God, may we always remember to love because You have first loved us. Amen.

Friday, December 17

Matthew 1:18-25

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE ANGEL VISITS JOSEPH

Kim Huffman

I have a couple of friends who were once incarcerated, and both say it was the best thing that ever happened to them because it was in prison where they met Jesus. In the most unlikely of places and in the most unlikely of ways, behind bars, shut off from the world, they met their personal Savior.

God works in mysterious ways. His ways are not our ways. Jesus' birth story was no exception. By the power of the Holy Spirit, a young virgin named Mary, who had never had sexual contact with a man, became pregnant with the Savior of the world. Her betrothed, Joseph, made plans to break off the engagement quietly, but an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the most unexpected of places – a dream – to tell him not to be afraid to marry, because Mary was made pregnant by God's Spirit. Joseph obeyed.

The Holy Spirit has been at work all throughout time – in prisons, in the conception of our Savior, and in our lives today. Pause and invite God's Spirit to show you where God is at work in the world around you. Might He be calling you to serve Him in the most unlikely of ways, perhaps with the poor, incarcerated, homeless, and marginalized in our community?

Saturday, December 18

Luke 2:1-7

THE ADVENT OF JESUS: THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Paul Giersz

Over 2000 years ago the birth of a child changed everything!

The birth and life of Jesus Christ is the most profound and planet transforming legacy of anyone or anything. Human history literally divides time at His birth into BC – Before Christ – and AD – Anno Domini, Latin for “in the year of our Lord.”

More songs and books have been written and more artwork commissioned about Jesus Christ than anyone who has ever lived. Literally today, billions of Christ followers around the world gather weekly celebrating, worshiping, adoring, and studying the life and words of this man, Jesus Christ, who forever changed this world.

H. G. Well said, “I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian, that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.”

Is He the most dominant figure in your life?