

# Advent Devotions Week 4 “Love”

Monday – Jim Pierce

*Love has come — a light in the darkness!  
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.  
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;  
hear how their song of joy arises:  
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!  
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.*

*Love has Come, ELW 292*

Years ago I learned those greek words for love used in the New Testament— *Philéo*, a companionable love, deep friendship; *Agápe*, a love called out by the preciousness of the object loved, unconditional love, *Storgé*, a natural affection for those things we “feel good” about, and *Éros*, erotic love, filled with passion, emotion. These words are useful in reflecting on how the love of that first crush, of spouse, of children, of football or the arts, of quiet time, of holidays (the list goes on) are all love, yet are not all the same.

Today, my thoughts travel in a different direction—love that has me as the focus but not me as the source.

At its root, much of love is all about ourselves. We love certain people, certain things we do, certain music, certain places, because of the way these make us feel. I might say “I love you because when I am with you I feel . . .” “I love you because you make me feel . . .” Do you hear what I’m saying? My love for you is really all about me. As long as you satisfy me in some way, the relationship is on. If that changes, good-bye love.

In Advent as during the Christmas and Epiphany seasons, Lent and Holy Week, we are invited to think about love with this twist: It is still all about us but its root is not us at all. Its root is (*get this!*) God who loves us, warts and all. God is love, love that comes as a light in the darkness, a baby in the manger, a savior who stretches out his arms in love as he dies on the cross.

If we let it, that love, God’s love, reaches out to us, reaches deep into our lives and turns us inside out. That love takes away my need for those persons, those things I love just because of how they make me feel. It replaces the insecurity that drives that love with the sure and certain knowledge that I am loved. It frees me to pour out love on others. I can do this not for what’s in it for me — I’ve already got all I need — but for what’s in it for them—God’s love reaching out to them through me. Wow!

That’s what it’s all about, this love we sing of in this season of waiting, God’s love that comes for me, but not just for me, not only for me. No, God’s love comes for me, and you, and you, and you, and them, and those folks over there, and . . . yes, you guessed it, for the whole of creation. Joy to the world, God’s love has come.

*Can I have an “Amen”?*

## Tuesday – Phil Hornbostel

A little book titled “The Children’s Bells”, a collection of poems for children, was published in 1957. Among the poems by Eleanor Farjeon were “Morning Has Broken”, a simple song of praise recalling the first day in Eden, and “People Look East”, a call to embrace the wonders of the Advent season through the eyes of children in the British countryside of Sussex. Both of these poems were quickly recognized as wonderful lyrics and set to traditional music from Scotland and France. The first was set to Bunessan, and is probably the better-known of the two, after a little Scottish village. The latter was set to Besancon, after a large French historical city near Switzerland.

Both were almost immediate sensations in the world of contemporary Christian music in the 1960’s, and “Morning Has Broken” even spent time on the Billboard Charts of Popular Music, recorded by Cat Stevens and rising to #6 in 1972. The lesser-known “People Look East” was selected for multiple contemporary Christian hymnals and appears first in Lutheran hymnody in “With One Voice” (#626”), and then in the current red hymnal (#248).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGjPQ5yitcM>

It is almost impossible to sing this hymn while seated; its message invites the congregation to stand, and even to “look East”. The reference is more obscure, but Ms. Farjeon may be recalling Revelation 7:2. Traditionally in the church, the Second Coming of the Messiah will indeed be from “the East”, the rising Sun (see also Ps. 84: 11). The second verse ties the harvest season to Advent, as in Psalm 65:9-13. Rev. 22: 5 undergirds the third verse, as the poet ties this theme to the contemporary appearance of the countryside during Advent. And then in the final verse, Isaiah 40: 4, a familiar Messianic prophecy is once again recalled.

But note that the refrain calls the listener back to the overarching theme of the Gospel: the many different faces of Love that God’s grace gives to us in this Advent season!

*Lord, Your Advent season calls us back to the Love and Grace that only You can give, and reminds us not so much of our unworthiness, but of Your steadfast love for us, and the eternal promise of grace, mercy, and peace through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We give You all praise and thanks for this wonderful gift in this blessed season. Amen.*

## Wednesday – Jeff Langdon

Over the past few weeks I have written about Hope, Peace and Joy. This week we focus on the final Advent theme of Love. ... continuing to reflect on one of my new favorite Advent songs- Advent Cry by Joseph Martin;

“Peace will come on the wings of a promise”  
Hope will come like the morning's first call  
Joy will come in the winds of the spirit  
**Love will come, Love will come**  
**Come Lord Jesus”.**

God's loving plan for us began in the beginning with God's very first act of love. Out of nothing God called forth light. God separated the sea from the land, created the sun, moon and the stars, and all the creatures of the earth. But a crowning act of love was us...humanity. We were created in God's own image and made to love and to be loved. However, we doubted God's love for us. But even with our fall into sin, we find God's loving mercy. God did not destroy us but made a promise of redemption.

God made Abraham a promise that his descendants would be a people who would bless all people. God foretold of the One who would free the captives, bear our sins, suffer in our place and usher in a peace unlike anything known. Isaiah prophesied the words of the Lord, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed," - Isaiah 54:10.

Though God's plan took time, God lovingly walked with us... through our suffering, temptations and trials. Generation after generation, God remained faithful to us... a humanity who continued to doubt, rebel and who walked away from the God who first loved us. Yet in the midst of it we had prophets like Nehemiah who testified, "You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love..."

Revisiting this big picture of God's love for God's people during Advent helps us understand the importance of the first Advent... the coming of Christ our Savior. Love, in the very presence of Jesus, came to fulfill the promises that God made generations and centuries before. It is because "God so loved the world that God's only Son was given, so that everyone who believes may not perish but have eternal life." - John 3:16.

We look back at that first Advent, remembering God's promise of redemption fulfilled, and we know that a new era had been ushered in... a era of waiting for that final Advent... the return of Christ. But what are we called to do as we wait? The answer is simple... we do what Christ does... we love. We do love, just like we do hope, do peace and do joy. We act. We remember what Jesus said when his critics questioned him about what is the greatest commandment... Jesus answered to love the Lord... and to "love your neighbor like yourself". In this Advent season and always... God wants us to act... to do love!

*Lord, help us to love one another more fully and more completely... love for our neighbors, our community, and all of your creation. Open our eyes for opportunities to act... for opportunities to do. We look forward to your return... The return of Love...the coming of Love. Come Lord Jesus. Amen*

## Thursday – Juel Pierce

*People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year.*

*Make your house fair as you are able, trim the heart and set the table.*

*People, look east, and sing today—Love, the Guest, is on the way.*

*Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there.*

*Give up your strength the seed to nourish, that in course the flower may flourish.*

*People, look east, and sing today—Love, the Rose, is on the way.*

*Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim, one more light the bowl shall brim,  
shining beyond the frosty weather, bright as sun and moon together.  
People, look east, and sing today—Love, the Star, is on the way.*

*Angels announce with shouts of mirth him who brings new life to earth.  
Set every peak and valley humming with the word, the Lord is coming.  
People, look east, and sing today—Love, the Lord, is on the way.*

ELW 248

One way we celebrate Advent as a family is to light the Advent candles after dinner, read one of the Bible texts from the daily lectionary, and pray together, and then sing Advent hymns. We did this as a family when I was growing up, and I invited our family to do the same as our children came and then as they grew older. Now Jim and I celebrate in the same way, even when it's just the two of us.

We have our own Advent and Christmas song sheets. This hymn is one of my favorites. I especially like the first verse—"make your house fair as you are able" because Love, the Guest is on the way!

This hymn reminds me that we can do a lot to make our home a place of love—how we treat each other, the care that we receive from each other, the care we give our home. But Love is not what we do or what we say. Love comes as a Guest. I appreciate how we experience that in our congregation. We are loving people, but even more than us, Love comes as a Guest to us as we gather to worship, as a Rose in bloom when our hearts are weary with sadness, as a Star lighting the way for us together. And of course, Love, the Lord brings us together. What a joyful celebration that is!

As we get closer to Christmas, we are invited to remember that Love, the Guest, and even more, Love, our Lord is on the way!

Love, our Lord, fill our hearts with your hope, your peace, your joy, and most of all your love in this season.

## Friday – Misty Coyle

*He made a way in a manger  
A way through the son  
Messiah the promised  
Before time had begun  
For God so loved this world  
Though he knew what love would cost  
He made a way in a manger  
To make a way to the cross*

***"He Made a Way in a Manger"***

Steve Merkel; sung by Vicky Beeching

<https://youtu.be/W8rG06pSHXE>

It is a desire of every heart to love and to be loved unconditionally in return. The Christmas Story assures us we begin our lives loved and will end our lives loved – by God himself. Love is a big idea most of us would like to believe we understand even though we may not be so good at actually doing it. We love those closest and good to us yet struggle to love those who hate us, who are not like us, or those who place a demand on our daily living such as refugees or people in distress. In fact, the term “love” is used so loosely in our time, it simultaneously expresses: affection, affinity, preference, physical attraction, emotional connection, and mutual commitment.

On a silent night more than 2,000 years ago, love was expressed as God’s commitment to an ancient promise – a Messiah for the people. God sent his son to the world to show us how to love each other and to love God because we have “missed the mark” responding to God’s love. Since the Garden of Eden, we have been looking to do as God has told us but through our own ways to make sure the benefit comes back to us. We hurt each other and take from each other when all along we were made to experience God’s love to show and give that same love to others – even those who are different from us.

God knew real love, revealed to us, modeled for us, touching us, filling us, and changing us, would fix the love-problem. A child would be born. His name would mean, “God With Us,” and he would be our example how to selflessly love one another. He would also endure the most extreme expression of love by suffering and dying for us, breaking the grip of sin and death for everyone.

In Jesus, we see that love is constant and sacrificial because love will never change, fail, or keep records of sins. Love always perseveres; withstand our greatest failures and successes; and remind us we are loved because of who we are and not by what we have done. That is the promised love remembered in the Christmas Story.

*Dear loving God, our hearts may not be open as big as you would like; but, we will remember to be faithful to your love for us. Let the light of your love shine through us so that everyone may know your love you made in a way of a manger. Amen!*

## Saturday – Rev. Roger Lenander

"What Wondrous Love Is This" captures our attention right from the beginning with its simplicity and persistence – "What wondrous love is this" sung three times. This repetition is not the sign of a weak poet who has a narrow range of expression, but a fellow traveler who has experienced profoundly the sacrificial love of Christ and can only express again and again – "What wondrous love is this." It is the kind of repetition that sounds trite when spoken, yet gains strength and power through singing. These are not the carefully crafted words of a theologian, but utterances directly from the heart or, even more profoundly, from the soul. (Dr. C. Michael Hawn)

What wondrous love is this,  
O my soul, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this  
that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse  
for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul?

When I was sinking down,  
sinking down, sinking down,  
when I was sinking down, sinking down,  
when I was sinking down  
beneath God's righteous frown,  
Christ laid aside his crown  
for my soul, for my soul,  
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb  
I will sing, I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb,  
who is the great I AM,  
while millions join the theme,  
I will sing, I will sing,  
while millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free,  
I'll sing on, I'll sing on;  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on;  
and when from death I'm free,  
I'll sing God's love for me,  
and through eternity  
I'll sing on, I'll sing on;  
and through eternity I'll sing on.

This song remains timely in our world today. It sings of God who chose not to wait until the Day of the Lord to come. God has come to us in our own time of pain and sorrow, trial and tribulation, fear and doubt. Dr. Martin Luther wrote, *"I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."* We sing of the wondrous love of God that is not only in the time that is to come, but is that love in our here and now.