

4th Sunday in Advent, December 19

Scripture Reading: Luke 1: 46-55

"for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name." (verse 49)

HE IS MY SAVIOR, TOO

The scripture for today, from Luke 1:46b-55, is sometimes referred to as "Mary's Song," the longest song by a woman in the Bible. Mary has just been told by an angel that the Holy Spirit will come to her and that she will give birth to a son. She is to call him Jesus.

In her excitement she sings this song of joy and love, praising Him that He is HER Savior! She is mindful of her humble state as a servant and marvels that God has done great things for her and that his mercy extends to others. For example, He has brought down rulers, filled the hungry with good things, done mighty deeds, and remembered Israel with mercy. Mary extends her praises to other generations and is thankful for all God has done... remembering it is a promise from long ago.

Many of my favorite songs are also praises calling out God's love. "*Love Lifted Me*," "*Love Divine All Loves Excelling*," "*Fairest Lord Jesus*," and others. These songs call out HIS love for me and give me reminders of my need to rejoice in His blessings.

God's LOVE has blessed me with a faithful marriage, honorable children, a church home, and safety throughout my life.

Praise God He is my Savior, too... Love Divine, Joy of earth come down!

Sharon Turk

Monday, December 20

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:1-21

“God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (verses 15-16)

GOD’S LOVE

The word *abide* appears eighty-two times in 77 verses of the Bible. Webster’s dictionary defines abide as: to remain, to dwell, to reside; an address, a residence.

In the spring of 1979 Sandy and I moved from Virginia to Daytona Beach. As career promotions followed, we changed addresses six additional times. In the spring of 1987 I became the Postmaster of DeLand. Shortly after setting up housekeeping at our new address, Sandy and I realized the beauty of the area and the community; and we agreed that DeLand was where we wanted to “abide” as our permanent address. Our son, Ian, attended First Presbyterian Day School; and we joined First Pres DeLand.

Thankfully, postal policy requiring managers to live in his/her service area was amended in the 1990’s. Additional appointments followed from Orlando to Jacksonville and several points between, but DeLand and First Pres remained our home.

John declares to his readers that ***“God is love,”*** and God initiated a loving relationship with us through First Pres. Our journey continues daily as we grow in this love relationship, living in God and his love. He lives in us.

May our loving God fill us all with peace and hope during this Advent season....

Joe Guthrie

Tuesday, December 21

Scripture Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'" (verses 26-28)

LOVE SENT AND SHARED

Growing up I attended a small country church with my aunt and uncle in southern Georgia. I loved the weekends I spent with them when we would attend Sunday School and worship services in the morning and then go back later in the day for an evening service.

Those were the years when I learned the Bible stories and hymns I will never forget... especially at Christmas with the nativity and beautifully sung Christmas carols. I didn't know then how those years would shape my life.

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend a lovely afternoon with my uncle's brother, who is now ninety-years-old. I sat on his porch, listening to his stories and memories of the years when I was growing up.

I was so moved hearing him share his faith and love for God; I was reminded how much God loves us through our families. I was reminded of the blessings of growing up in that little church, where I learned about the love a tiny baby can bring into the world.

Jackie Metzger

Wednesday, December 22

Reading: Lyrics to "What Child is This?"

*What child is this, who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
This, this is Christ the King
The Babe, the son of Mary
(William Chatterton Dix)*

HIS LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE

Jesus entered this world as a baby!
The wonder of His birth and beginning of His love for ALL
people gives us great joy!

This reminds me of when my sister Patti was born. I was almost five. She arrived much too early and weighed only 2 pounds, 11 ounces. Most babies born that small in 1951 did not survive, but Patti was a fighter.

Patti developed slowly and our family celebrated her milestones. We even made friends with many other families with special needs children. Everyone was included in the gatherings of these families... and this was the beginning of my appreciation for people of all abilities.

Each Christmas we enjoyed singing Christmas carols around our neighborhood. Patti enjoyed music as a very young child and continues to enjoy the hymns and praise songs at church. We have continued the family tradition of singing Christmas carols as we pile in the car to look at Christmas lights and sing carols.

As we celebrate Jesus' birth this year, I am most grateful for the people of this church who warmly welcome Patti and me as valuable members of this body of Christ.

Kathy Ambachsheer and Patti Conroy

Thursday, December 23

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-7

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (verse 2)

THE DEPTH OF GOD’S LOVE

How do we comprehend God’s love? We do the best we can, given our humanness. Like other aspects of God’s nature, we try to understand it by putting it in human terms.... and, like all such attempts, our expression of “love” as we know it is flawed because it is not always unconditional.

How can we fully comprehend God’s love when we cannot live into it? Under what circumstances, for example, could we ever say that there is nothing that could separate us from the love of another human being? Consider that Mary and Joseph so loved the world that they gave their son....

Sometimes we read scripture without really embracing the full depth of its meaning. What are we willing to give up that would really show our love to another? We might think of a few things but how can they compare to the sacrifice of the living God! The creator of the ends of the earth comes from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows, from the realm of the heavens to a baby in a manger in a stable—for the single reason: to mend a broken relationship that have eternal consequences.

Now we are just two days away from celebrating the miraculous birth. May we take just a moments to pause to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s unconditional love, wrapped in bands of cloth.

Michael Bodger

Friday, Christmas Eve

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20

“And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them... But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Verse 18)

THE WONDERS OF HER LOVE

The celebration of Jesus’ birth, a miraculous event, reminds us that Mary possessed a deep love for Jesus from the moment of His birth. This year, I’m focusing on the “wonders of her love”....

My life has been blessed with a family that experienced unconditional love, as shown by our mother just as Mary did for Jesus. Mom exemplified the joys of motherhood by sharing her love through kindness, compassion, and patience. Her actions and encouraging words shaped us into caring adults.

Music has been influential in my life. It filled our home...mom singing and playing piano...singing Christmas songs with our grandmother, a professional musician, and learning my first guitar chords from my brother, Bill.

As a shy girl (for real), I grew up and transformed into a confident teenager, able to share music with family, friends, and church. My love of sharing music continues today.

This verse leads me to the lyrics of, “*Mary Did You Know?*” by Mark Lowry, as I consider the feelings Mary experienced. Imagine her pondering....

***Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you’ve kissed your little baby, then you’ve kissed the face of God.***

This song touches my heart as I reflect how every mother around the world has an incredible role in nurturing caring, strong, and independent children just as Mary did through the “wonders of her love.”

Jean Burns

Saturday, Christmas Day

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-5

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. . .” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ***Letters and Papers from Prison***

WE CAN SHOW HIS LOVE

Christmas was approaching and I was feeling lonely. My husband had died, and my children and their families were going to their in-laws for Christmas. It seemed like everyone I knew had someone to spend Christmas with.... Or did they?

When I looked around at my friends and neighbors, I realized that many of them were like me with no family nearby. The house was decorated and ready for a celebration so I organized a brunch for Christmas morning, which everyone shared in preparing. The morning became even more festive when my friend Kathy played the piano, and we sang carols.

God showed His love for us when He spoke and Jesus was born. We can show our love for others by speaking also. Text or phone a friend. Knock on a neighbor’s door just to say Merry Christmas! Do it today! It’s not too late to brighten someone’s holiday!

Rosemary Plane

