

Advent Means... LOVE!

Advent Means... #4 – Gary Combs – December 24, 2023 – John 3:16

Children's sermon: Hello children, do you want to help me unwrap the greatest gift of all? Now, if you're really quiet and well behaved, I'll give you a prize at the end. OK?

ILL: Have you heard of Furoshiki ? It's the Japanese art of wrapping gifts with cloth rather than paper. Let's unwrap this gift and see what's inside... (Bible inside). It's the Word of God! Let's open it and unwrap the Christmas story!

Read: Luke 2:1-14 (ESV) 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Hey kids, I heard that you learned a new Prove It verse? Did you hear it read just now? Let's repeat it...

Luke 2:10-11 (ESV) 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Did you hear the part about the sign that the angel told the shepherds to look for? What was it?

Luke 2:12 (ESV) And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

So, baby Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths. Jesus, the greatest gift of love that God has given to us, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a humble manger. My prayer for each of you is that you would believe and receive this wonderful gift of love that God has given us in Jesus. And speaking of gifts, we have a little gift for you for being so quiet and attentive. (Give the kids a candy cane as they are seated.)

SERMON: Merry Christmas church! We are finishing our series entitled "Advent Means..." Today's sermon is Advent Means... LOVE! Above all else Advent, which means arrival or coming, is about God's love coming to us!

You see, that's what motivated the greatest gift ever given. It was God's love. Yes, Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths, but more than that, He was wrapped in God's love. As the Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave." What did He give? He gave us Jesus.

As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9:6). And as the angels proclaimed, "Unto you is born this day" (Luke 2:11). Jesus is God's gift of love to us... to you!

Trans: So, God has given us this gift. It's for you. It's got your name on it. But it's not really yours until you open it and receive it for yourself. Have you done that? Have you received God's gift of love?

BODY: In the gospel of John, Jesus told a prominent Jewish teacher named Nicodemus about God's gift of love. Nicodemus didn't understand, so Jesus explained it to him. We can understand and receive this gift of love today. Let's open it up and see what's inside... Here's what Jesus said:

Text: John 3:16 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

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Opening the most important gift, we find the gift of ...

1. **LOVE.** *(Turn the outer box around so the word “Love” shows.)*

EXP: “For God so loved the world...”

“**So loved**” – ἠγάπησεν, *agape* – Unconditional love. The word “so” denotes degree. God’s great love.

ARG: **The depth of God’s love is shown in that He gave us His Son to die in our place.**

John 15:13 (NIV) Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

APP: Kings are born in palaces, but lambs are born in stables. This gift from God came as the Lamb of God to take upon Himself the sins of the world. The cradle points to the cross. Christmas points to Easter.

As the apostle Paul said,

Romans 5:8 (NIV) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Do you know this truth in your life, that God **so** loved you? It’s not because of something you have done but because of who He is. He deeply loves you and His love gives and restores and saves. Will you receive it?

2. **LORD.** *(Open the outer box to reveal the box with “Lord” on it.)*

EXP: “...that he gave his only begotten Son ...”

“**He gave**” – Gave, not sent, not loaned, gave! God gave His best to us, to do with as we please. “Son” – This is a relational gift. Not just a “Happy Holidays” card. This is the gift of relationship.

“**Only begotten**” – Unique, one of a kind. No one like Him. The uncreated entered creation, the eternal entered the temporal, the infinite entered the finite. Christ, the one and only, entered our common reality!

ARG: **As the angels proclaimed, Christ Jesus is the Lord! He is God in the flesh.**

Luke 2:10-11 (ESV) “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the **Lord**.”

APP: Do you understand that love motivated God to give us His only begotten son? The only way to know this love is to receive the One in whom it resides.

3. **LIFE.** *(Open the inner box so the word “Life” shows.)*

EXP: “...that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“**Whoever**” – This is an open invitation to all who would believe.

“**Believes**” (πιστεύω, *pisteuo*) – To place faith, to entrust, to commit.. “Believes” and keeps on believing.

“**In him**” – Not “about” him, “into” him. Place one’s trust into him. Stake your life in/on him.

“**Not perish**” – We’re dying already. There is already an expiration date when we’re born because of sin.

“**Everlasting life**” – This describes not only the quantity, but also the quality of life.

ARG: **Not only a new quantity of life (eternal), but also a new quality (abundant).**

John 10:10 (NKJV) I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

APP: Receiving the gift of Jesus you exchange your sin, separation and death for His righteousness, His relationship with God, and His eternal life.

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CONCLUSION: You might be wondering, was there anything else in this gift? That's a good question, let's see... because the gospel of John also says:

John 1:4 (NKJV) In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. (Reveal the LIGHT box. Light the Christ candle.)

This last candle in the center of our Advent wreath represents Christ Jesus who is the source of our hope, peace, joy and love. Receiving Jesus, we receive God's wonderful gift of love!

You can open and receive the most important gift of Christmas this year. A gift ...

- **Wrapped in God's LOVE.**
- **Containing the LORD Jesus Christ.**
- **Offering you eternal LIFE.**
- **And LIGHT to live by in this world today.**

Let's pray.

DECISION TIME: Give instructions for "Yes" packets, guests, offering and Lord's Supper.

CANDLE LIGHTING: (After the decision song, as the band begins to play "Silent Night," light your candle from the Christ candle).

Receiving the gift of Jesus and eternal life we also receive the gift of His light, which is wisdom and understanding to see clearly and to follow Him in a dark world. Jesus said,

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12 (ESV)

Having received this most important gift, we have also been given a most important calling, a calling to be a light in this world. As Jesus told his disciples:

"You are the light that gives light to the world." - Matthew 5:14 (NCV) (Ask everyone to stand and sing "Silent Night." Begin the process of lighting everyone's candle.)

BENEDICTION: (After all have lit candles and "Silent Night" is done) Look around you. See how the room lights up one light at a time?

Will you carry the gift of LIGHT to a world in darkness? Will you carry the Good News of Jesus and God's love?

Blow out your candles and remember that it is you whom Christ has called to both walk in His light and to be a light in this world.

Now, may the Lord bless and keep you. May He make His face to shine upon you and give you peace.

Merry Christmas!