

Scripture:
 Luke 1:26-38

“God’s love.”

Ann Weems ---- in her poem ---- “Gifts from God” ----- writes:

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
 God’s mercies never come to an end.
 They are new every morning.

The Lord God gave the peoples of the earth a garden,
 and the people said, “That’s very nice, God, but that’s not enough.
 We’d like a little knowledge please.”

The Lord God gave them knowledge,
 and the people said, “Now that we have knowledge, we’d like things.”

The Lord God gave the people things,
 but they always said, “That’s not quite enough.”

So the Lord God gave them gifts unequalled:
 the sun
 lightning and thunder
 rain and flowers
 animals and birds and fish
 trees and stars and the moon.

God gave them the rainbow.
 God parted the Red Sea and gave them manna.
 God gave them prophets
 and children
 and each other,
 but still the people said, “That’s not quite enough.”

God loved the people
 and out of ultimate merciful goodness
 God gave them the Gift of Gifts,
 a Christmas present never to be forgotten.

God gave them love
in the form of God's Son,
Christ Jesus.

There are some that don't open their eyes or their ears or their hearts
and they still say, that's not quite enough.

They wander through the stores looking for Christmas.

But others open their whole being to the Lord,
bending their knees to praise God,
carrying Christmas with them every day.
For these the whole world is a gift."

Everything we have is a gift from God.

And we are blessed with these gifts ----- not because of anything we have
done --- but because of the nature of God's love.

Unfortunately too often ---- despite all of the gifts God's blesses us with -----
- and despite all of the love God blesses us with --- we still want more.

Ann Weems does a pretty good job --- of outlining all of the blessings ---
gifts --- and love ---- that God provides to us.

And yet ---- many of us ---- much of the time ---- still want more.

We want to know why things happen as they do --- and we won't settle for
anything less than an answer that satisfies all of our questions and concerns.

Too many people --- despite all of the wonderful blessings God provides ---
still want more.

Failing to open our eyes --- ears --- and hearts up to God ----- as Weems
writes ----- we wander around looking for Christmas --- looking for more
gifts ---- for more information --- for more something ---- as if we aren't
quite satisfied with how God is handling things.

Anne Weems in her poem --- and more importantly scripture --- over and over --- and over again ----- invites us to re-focus our thoughts and longings and thanksgiving.

Indeed our reading from Luke's gospel invites us to do just this --- change the way we see things and re-orient our lives.

Mary starts out ----- greatly troubled in verse 29 ----- wondering what kind of greeting this might be.

And in verse 34 she says ----- "How will this be?"

And then by the end of this very short encounter she has a radical change of heart ----- gone is the troubled confusion --- replaced instead by trust and faith ----- "I am the Lord's servant --- May your word to me be fulfilled." ----- Mary says in verse 38.

As Mary's life bears witness to ----- God intervenes in the world upsetting schedules ---- upsetting time lines --- upsetting pre-conceived notions and cultural understandings and practices ---- re-aligning lives --- and re-orienting hearts.

God loves us so much so that He brings us what we need ---- not necessarily what we want --- but what we need.

The challenging part is that we cannot always understand God's ways --- even though He has our best intentions in mind.

God's creation had gone so far awry and was so far out of line with how He originally intended it ----- that He had to intervene decisively and engage in a miraculous rescue plan.

God intervened at Christmas --- sending Jesus Christ ----- to defeat sin ---- - to do away with evil and death having any kind of lasting power or influence.

God didn't just send Jesus and intervene at Christmas ---- so that we could have another holiday ---- or give us a reason to gather with family --- and host a big meal and exchange all kinds of presents.

God intervened at Christmas ---- to show us that the long awaited rescue plan of salvation was finally moving forward in tangible and visible ways.

God intervened at Christmas to give His greatest gift --- His Son.

We got the Garden of Eden from God --- but we got greedy and wanted --- and took more.

We got all kinds of blessings in life --- but we got greedy and wanted and took more.

So God had to act decisively and step down and set things right once and for all --- in Jesus Christ.

After ages and ages of waiting for God to set things right --- it finally began to unfold.

After ages and ages of waiting ----- a mother had finally been chosen to give birth to the Messiah.

God's will ---- was finally kicking into high gear --- with the angel coming to Mary and saying ----- beginning at verse 31 from Luke's gospel today ----

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” ----- “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born to you will be called the Son of God.”

God finally decided that it was time to act decisively --- and step down into His creation ---- and save it from all the foolishness --- and greed --- and sin that was destroying it.

It's as if God said ----

“Mary my child ----- it's time.

It's time --- and I'm choosing you.

I've decided to come in human form.

And I'm going to come as a boy named Jesus and you are going to give birth to Him and be His mother.

And as He grows up He will take the throne of David and He will reign over Israel forever ----- and beyond just this ---- he will have an eternal Kingdom that will never end.

His kingdom shall be in people's heart ---- and for all time.

The time has come --- it will be now --- and it begins with you.”

God chooses because God chooses.

God loves because God loves.

Mary doesn't earn or deserve the honour of becoming the mother of Jesus anymore than any other woman would or could have.

The Biblical story is not one of virtue rewarded or vice punished ----- instead it is the story of the relentlessly unmerited nature of God's love.

God's love is at the centre of creation --- God's love is at the centre of the fall --- and sin --- and God's love is at the centre of the restoration and salvation of creation.

God's love is at the heart of every single thing that happens in life --- from beginning to end --- the good and the not so good ----- the obvious and the not so obvious --- and everything in between.

Even if we can't always --- see --- experience --- and appreciate it --- let alone understand it --- all that happens --- all that doesn't happen ---- is ----- from a certain --- eternal ---- perspective the result of God's love.

God comes to Mary with news of the long long long long long awaited Messiah's coming ----- through her ----- why?

Because it is all a part of God's loving --- saving plan.

God's love is already and always and forever will be ----- at work in the world.

We don't have to manufacture or try to generate God's presence ----- influence --- and love.

It already is.

What we do have to do is respond when God comes to us --- when God chooses us ----- just like Mary did when God came to her with the news of her pregnancy.

Mary allowed herself to be used and employed by God and for God.

She joined in God's great and saving work of salvation already taking place in Jesus Christ.

When we celebrate Christmas that's part of what we're doing ----- we're joining in and celebrating God's great and saving work of salvation already taking place in Jesus Christ.

We gather with family --- and share in great big meals.

We exchange gifts --- and share smiles and laughs.

Not just to fill our tummies and be satisfied.

Not just so we can have more fun in life by having more stuff --- getting great gifts.

We gather --- and we eat --- and we exchange gifts ----- because we are celebrating the love of God in sending Jesus Christ and acting decisively once and for all.

We pull out all the stops and celebrate differently than any other time of the year --- precisely because God pulled out all the stops and did something different than He had ever done.

He came down in human form ----- to let us know that one day all misery will end ---- all sickness will end --- all nasty and hurtful ----- all diminishing of the human spirit behaviour will one day end.

And it all starts they way each and every one of us started --- humble --- dependant --- fragile ---- beautiful --- mysteriously ----- as a little baby.

How many of us ---- at the end of Christmas Day have ever said something like --- "Now that's how you celebrate God's love."

We are far more likely to have said something like --- “Now that was a good Christmas ---- or that was a good day!” ----- because the food was good --- the gifts were fun --- and we enjoyed ourselves.

And of course there is nothing wrong with good food --- company and fun gifts --- but at the end of the day that isn’t all the day is about ---- it’s about God’s love.

The truth is ---- we are relational beings.

As the priest and poet John Donne said ----- “No man is an island.”

“No man is an island --- unto himself ---- we are all part of something greater.”

Christmas is all about the relationship between God and His creation --- and how Jesus bridges this gap.

Redemption and salvation is not something we can do for ourselves --- or by ourselves ----- it comes in relationship.

In comes freely in God’s love.

And God’s love is most powerfully expressed in what is about to come from Mary --- baby Jesus ---- Messiah and Saviour to all who desire that He be so.

God could have simply set things right --- offered salvation --- and restoration to right relationship with a puff of smoke or pillar of fire ----- but He doesn’t.

He chooses relationship.

He chooses people ---- people like Mary and John ---- and Joseph ----- Moses --- Jeremiah and so on --- the list goes.

God chooses relationship.

God’s love is all about personal relationship.

Relationship with Jesus Christ which by its very nature also involves and includes relationship with other human beings.

God's love.

God's loving relationship with His creation.

That's what Christmas is all about --- that's what Advent is preparing us for.

God's loving relationship with His creation --- set right once again through Jesus Christ.

If we don't get this.

If we don't appreciate this.

All the rest of Christmas ---- great food ---- good times ---- fun stuff --- gifts ----- will never ever cut it.

We'll only ever want more and more gifts --- more and more stuff ----- to try to fill the void we have inside of us.

We mustn't ever get so caught up in the other stuff of Christmas that we lose focus.

As the poet said ----

“There are some that don't open their eyes or their ears or their hearts and they still say, that's not quite enough.”

And then there are others who do open their eyes --- their ears -- and their hearts ----- and hear this message -----

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” ----- and ----- “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born to you will be called the Son of God.”

Christmas is about God's great rescue plan being set into motion.

And it's about God choosing people --- like Mary --- like you and me ----- to be a part of His plan.

God could have foregone including people and just miraculously changed things --- but He didn't ----- He choose to involve us ---- He choose to include us --- He chose personal relationship --- intimacy.

With the crackling of that little voice of the baby Jesus nothing would ever be the same again.

John said it best ----- "God so loved the world that he sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him --- will have life eternal."

The whole of the Biblical story is a story of love.

And that's what Christmas is all about ----- God's love for us in a visible and concrete way.

As we sit around Christmas trees --- share meals --- exchange gifts ----- and enjoy ourselves --- remember the whole point of the season --- the real story behind Christmas is God's love in that little child.

There are some ----- that don't open their eyes or their ears or their hearts and they still say, that's not quite enough.

They wander through life looking for Christmas --- looking for more stuff --- - or more experiences ---- there are such things as adrenaline and experience junkies.

But thankfully there are also others ----- those who open their whole being to the Lord,
bending their knees to praise God,
carrying Christmas with them every day.

May we be the ones who bend our knees to praise God this Christmas.

And may we be the ones who carry Christmas --- who carry Christ --- with us every day.

Christmas ---- more than just a good time and a few days off to be with family and friends.

Christmas ----- the beginning of God's great love story come alive like never before.

Amen.