

## What Love Looks Like

Christmas Day, 2019

Luke 2:1-20

### Slide: Love Came Down

It is a cold, crisp December night when a young woman gives birth to her first-born son. After the pain of childbirth, a doctor cries out, "it's a boy", and sudden relief mixed with joy fills the hospital room. The boy is cleaned, his tiny frame is weighed and measured, and a nurse places the little baby into the mother's arms for the first time. This mother says, "I love you."

As a young child, her boy wants his Mom's constant attention: "Mommy, look at this!" "Mommy, look what I'm doing!" "Mommy, look at what I drew for you!" Each and every night, the little boy wants Mommy to kiss him and tuck him in and the mother says, "goodnight, my little one. I love you."

The little boy grows up to be a teen and wants his mother to leave him more alone. He doesn't want her to hug him,

nor get in the way of his new activities with his friends, as teenagers normally do. It is natural thing, this desire for independence and in fact, that is an important part of growing up. And, the Mother, having to accept this, finds other ways to say, "I love you."

Then, quite suddenly one day, this young man's mother finds heroin in his coat pocket, and after some very difficult times, this young man is arrested for drug possession and use, because his mother, who could no longer reach him, loved him enough to turn him in. As he is placed in the back of the police car, his mother says, "I did this because I love you." And, with a look of betrayal and anger, her son says, "I never want to see you again. I hate you."

Does this story end happily? Perhaps...you can fill in the gaps to this story yourself. But this story does begin not unlike another one we hear this time of year, as a young woman gives birth to a son on what may have been a cold night. No doubt, she too said, "I love you" to her little

baby son. And, she too had to endure a suffering heartache, knowing that her son would need to grow only so that he could die for the sake of all. Did she know? Did she know that her child would die and for a unique purpose?

Now, you just might be thinking, "This is Christmas Day...why do we have to hear such a difficult story?" Yet, with all our carols and joy, with all the celebrations with family, and with all the comfort we desire within this beautiful Christmas story, this baby boy, Jesus, came to us for one purpose:

**...to love us as the God who suffers with us and for us. God is also one who suffers.**

Perhaps the Christmas story has the feeling of being old and stale for some of you. After all, you hear it every year and maybe it doesn't strike you as newly exciting. It is almost too familiar to us. And, the commercialism and secularism surrounding this time of the year has made the Christmas story so cuddly and cute, so sentimental, so saccharin that it

almost loses its meaning in the din. Who can't relate to this, when Christmas is hyped up so much, that we can't but feel the slight let down when it's over and life is the same.

For, a cuddly baby with cuddly sheep and cuddly oxen doesn't really help us when on Christmas; we are not in the zone, sad or in pain, sick or infirm, depressed or questioning. This story is heard so much, and has been reduced to sweetness so much, that it seems to reduce even God's incredible Christmas power, and who wants such a cute cuddly God, now seeming powerless under the weight of our culture?

But if we look to the true purpose of Christmas, God taking on skin, bones, muscle, and tissue, and choosing to live through the difficulties of life, like us, including taking on the mortality of us, the love of God takes on new meaning at Christmastime. God suffers with us and takes on being fragile with us. And although God is a baby at Christmas, which is the most fragile experience of all, God as a

loving, suffering parent is the manger image that I would want to conjure up on this day, of all days.

As a parent, God will do anything to love us as children, and it is a love that goes even beyond a human parent's love for their child. God's love is there at our birth and baptism when God says, "I love you. You are mine."

God's love is there when we want God's attention as young children. "Look at me, God! Look what I did!" Look, I drew you!"

God's love is there when we separate ourselves from God, wanting very little to do with all that God stuff.

And, God's love is there when we are at our worst, in suffering and pain, when we turn away from God completely, saying, "I never want to see you again. I hate you."

You see, the real power of Christmas is God's love for us, love like a parent, yet a stronger and a harder love than

we can imagine. And, no matter what we do or how far we choose to stray from God's presence, God will never stop loving us, even when a human parent might.

This, all this, you can see in the manger, when God came to show fragility. This you can see in his ministry with us as Jesus Christ. This you can see when he suffered and died. And, the greatest love of God could never be taken away from us, when, at the grave, God ultimately conquered death, so that we may know how wide that love truly is.

**God is our loving, breathing, living and dying parent, come forth as a human baby, as Immanuel, God with us.**

That is the secret of this Christmas story we hear wrapped in all the lessons and carols of this day. So, Merry Christmas, and know in your hearts that your parent God loves you...and will never stop...no matter what. Amen.