

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Senior Pastor Titus Green
December 18, 2022
Light And Life To All He Brings - LOVE
Luke 2:29-35

On the day of Christ's birth, the angel of God appeared in the middle of the dark night to a group of shepherds on a hillside. This was his message...

Luke 2:11

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. After the angels presented Jesus to the shepherds, the story of Christmas continued with Jesus being presented by Mary and Joseph at God's Temple in Jerusalem.

Luke 2:22-32

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Into the darkness of this sinful, rebellious world, God sent His Son to bring us His LOVE. So, we light this fourth candle of Advent as a reminder that the greatest LOVE is found in a person and His name is Jesus.

Emily and I were friends for about a year before we started dating. It's a long, wonderful story, but while we were friends, she tried to set me up on a couple of blind dates with some of her friends. I found it interesting she only introduced me to girls who weren't even close to compatible with me. It was almost as if she didn't want those relationships to work out.

But we continued to talk, and our friendship continued to grow. We both loved old movies. We both loved old singers like Nat King Cole. We both think Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year.

We both loved eating absurd amounts of ice cream. And, as our friendship developed over time, there was a point where I could tell something was going on in my heart toward her that I wasn't saying out loud. I wasn't even willing to acknowledge it to myself. And, at the same time, I couldn't help but wonder what was going on in her heart toward me. I knew we were friends and got along well. But I couldn't believe someone as smart and beautiful as Emily could have romantic feelings toward a guy like me.

But, in the late fall of 1998, Emily and I went to dinner at Outback Steakhouse. Over dinner, we had the DTR – the 'define-the-relationship' talk. I revealed what was in my heart for her. She revealed what was in her heart for me – apparently, she had a bit of a thing for nerds! We walked into that restaurant as friends. We walked out as a couple. That moment changed the trajectory of the rest of our lives. Every substantial element of our lives on earth has been bound to one another - our children, our home, our daily routines, and all our future plans. In a very real way, our whole lives have grown out of the moment when we revealed what was in our hearts for one another.

And this morning's text tells us that Jesus came into this world to bring about a similar dynamic between God and us. To reveal God's heart to us and to reveal our hearts, as well. As a matter of fact, let me go ahead and tell you that's the big idea for our text this morning.

Big Idea: Jesus came to reveal what is in God's heart for us and what is in our hearts for Him.

Now let's dig into our text and I'll show you why I say that. Last week, we looked at these verses about Simeon and saw that he is a picture of the kind of hope Jesus came to give us. God told him he wouldn't die until he saw the Savior God promised to send into the world. And, because Simeon believed God, he waited with patience and confidence for God's promises to be fulfilled. That's why he is a picture of hope. But there's more to learn from this interaction between Simeon and Jesus. Simeon teaches us that Jesus came to reveal what was in God's heart for us. Let me show you what I mean.

Verse 30-32

30 ...my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

As Simeon holds baby Jesus in his arms, he begins to prophesy about Jesus. And notice what he says. In verse 30, he says that Jesus was the salvation God had been preparing to bring into this world. In verse 32, he says that the salvation God had been preparing to bring through Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to God's people in Israel. In other words, Jesus reveals something through the salvation He brings.

Now, look down at verse 34:

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed..."

God sent Jesus into this world to be a sign that is opposed. Jesus was a sign that was opposed. What event in Jesus' life best fits that description? I would say the crucifixion. The ultimate

expression of opposition to Jesus was at the cross when He was nailed to a tree and pierced through His hands and feet and side. Is there any evidence that fits with Simeon's prophecy?

Keep reading into verse 35: (*and a sword will pierce through your own soul also*), Simeon tells Mary that a sword will pierce her own soul ALSO. The meaning of that is pretty clear. 33 years after Mary held Jesus in her arms in the temple, she would stand at the foot of the cross, watching a Roman soldier pierce the side of her Son. She would feel a sword pierce her heart to the depth of her soul. This baby resting quietly in Simeon's arms, this child who was sent into this world by God the Father would be violently killed to pay for the sin of mankind to bring about salvation to anyone who would trust in Him.

And Simeon says that event reveals something to the world. What does Jesus' crucifixion for our salvation reveal? There lots of things revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus – God's holiness, justice and judgment but, there's one specific thing I want us to think about this morning.

John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The heart of God is revealed in the giving of His Son Jesus to be crucified for the sins of the world. And what is in God's heart for us? Love. We are loved by God. You are loved by God. Let that wash over you for just a moment. You are loved by God.

Friend, the most important thing about you is that you are loved by God. It's more important than your social or economic status. It's more important than your marital status. It's more important than the greatest or worst thing you've ever done. No matter who loves you or hates you, no matter who accepts you or rejects you, no matter what you have going for you and no matter how the deck is stacked against you. Absolutely nothing is more important than the fact that you are loved by God.

Jesus came to reveal God's heart of love for you. But let's not stop there. Just think about how Jesus reveals the depth of God's love for us.

1. Jesus reveals how much God's love was willing to give.

The depth of our love corresponds with how much we are willing to give to the one we love.

The best picture I know to give you is what happens when loving parents welcome their children into the world. Emily and I didn't necessarily realize it at the time, but having kids came with tremendous sacrifice. We gave up restful nights' sleep to tend to crying babies. We gave up relaxing evenings after work to entertain and care for needy children. We gave up our hobbies so we could afford diapers. We gave up staying out with friends so we could get our kids to bed on time. And you know what? We didn't give it a second thought. I don't even like to say we gave those things up because

all we were doing was loving our kids. Em and I love those children more than we love life itself. We would give anything at our disposal to care for any of our kids. Do you believe me when I say that?

So, how much would I have to love someone to give up one of my children for them? And do you think God loves His Son less than we love ours? Yet, He willingly gave His only Son to suffer and die for you. Jesus reveals how much God's love was willing to give.

2. Jesus reveals how little we deserve God's love.

My Mamaw and Papaw were both amazing people. And they both dearly loved one another. And, while it was always inspiring to witness how much they loved each other, it wasn't exactly amazing to me that they loved each other. When I thought about how awesome my Mamaw was, I would think, "Of course, Papaw loves her. How could he not love her? She's the best." And the same was true when I thought about how great Papaw was. Of course, Mamaw would love him, he was the best.

It isn't amazing to see someone love a person who is loveable. But have you ever known someone who had the capacity to love unlovable people?

In 1993, a 16-year-old named Oshea Israel killed another young man at a party. He was tried as an adult and convicted of 2nd degree murder. In 2010 he was released from prison and a woman named Mary Johnson organized a homecoming party for him. She was a Christian lady who knew his story and had decided to visit him often while he was in prison. Her love transformed his life. She became like a mother to him and was committed to helping him turn his life around. Eventually, Oshea moved into the house next to Mary and the two of them traveled around the country, speaking to various groups about the power of God's love and forgiveness. It's a beautiful story about a woman who chose to love and forgive an unlovable young man. What makes it even more powerful is that Mary's son was the young man who was murdered by Oshea.

Can you imagine loving the person who was responsible for the death of your son? That's exactly how God loves you. It was your sin and mine that sent Jesus to the cross. Every act of sin is an act of war against God. Yet, Romans 5:8 says that while we were still sinners, God shows His love for us in that Jesus died for us. We don't deserve it but, God loves us anyway.

3. Jesus reveals how blessed we are by God's love.

If someone helps you pass a test at school, you will feel a certain kind of love. If someone helps you purchase a home you can't afford without their help, you will feel a deeper kind of love. If someone helps you regain your health by giving you one of their kidneys, you will feel another kind of love. If someone risks their life to free you from a prisoner of war camp, you will feel an even deeper sense of love. The greater the blessing, the deeper the love.

1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Jesus came to show us the kind of love that was willing to die to save us from an eternity in hell and make us children of God Himself. There is no greater blessing and there is no deeper love. Friend, you are loved by God. He paid the dearest price and gave the greatest blessing out of a heart of love. You don't deserve it. You can not earn it. Nothing you do could ever make Him love you more and nothing you do will ever make Him love you less.

My friend, Bob Rowell's favorite song says it well...

*Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky*

*O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song*

Jesus came to reveal what is in God's heart for you and His heart is filled with love. But Jesus didn't just come to reveal what is in God's heart. Jesus came to reveal what is in our hearts for God. Look back at our text in Luke 2.

Luke 2:34-35

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Jesus Christ came to this world to reveal thoughts from many hearts. That word “many” is often used as a way of describing everyone. For instance, ***Romans 5:19 says “For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.”*** That's talking about the sin of Adam in the garden of Eden. Earlier in Romans 5, Paul says that it is by that one sin that everyone became a sinner. So, “many” in that text is referring to everyone. ALL have sinned. And that's the way it is being used back in Luke 2. Jesus reveals what is in everyone's heart toward God.

You see, everyone in the world will be judged by how they respond to Jesus. That's why verse 34 says He was appointed for the fall and the rising of many. That word “rising” is mainly used in the New Testament to describe the resurrection. So, EVERYONE will either fall into destruction by rejecting Jesus or you will be raised to a glorious new life by embracing Jesus.

How you respond to Jesus makes all the difference. Listen to the way Peter says it in 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2:6-8

6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."

Verse 6 says He is chosen and precious. That means he is a treasure. And you will either love Jesus as your greatest treasure or you will stumble over Him and reject Him. Jesus is either the foundation of your life or as valueless to you as a stone you would reject and cast aside. There is no middle ground. How you respond to Jesus reveals what is in your heart for God.

So, are you treasuring Jesus? Is He the foundation for everything in your life? You see, there are countless people who will celebrate the arrival of Jesus as Christmas. But that's not the same as treasuring Jesus as the greatest gift of God's love.

You and I both know there are people who say they are followers of Christ, but they marginalize Him in their lives. He is little more than an afterthought to their families or their careers or their plans. It's why so-called Christians live lives that are barely different than the rest of this world. They pursue the same goals and ambitions as their unsaved friends and neighbors. Listen, a marginalized Jesus is not the foundation for your life. Marginalizing Jesus is little more than rejecting Him.

And there are others who manipulate Jesus. They come to Him as though He is just a powerful butler or a cosmic vending machine. They only want Jesus if He will bless their finances or save their marriages or protect their children or restore their health. They don't fall before Him as Lord and embrace Him as their treasure. Listen to me friend, Jesus will not be manipulated. He is either Lord of all or He isn't Lord, at all!

So, what is in your heart for Jesus? Have you placed your faith and trust in Him as Lord of your life and Savior of your soul? Your eternal destiny will rise or fall on how you respond to Jesus. That's why He came from heaven to earth, to reveal what is in God's heart for you and to reveal what is in your heart for God.

On this Sunday before Christmas, will you receive the greatest gift that has ever been given, the gift of God's love in the life of God's Son?