

WEEK 4: *Renew* **LOVE**

Scripture Readings (NIV)

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Isaiah 7:10-16

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

12 But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

13 Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, 16 for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

Awaken your might;
come and save us.

3 Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

4 How long, Lord God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

6 You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.

7 Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

18 Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.





Romans 1:1-7

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18-25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Devotional

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Transcript

Full Extent of God's Love

This is the last week of Advent. You know, I still find Advent exciting because it brings me back to my childhood. You see, as a child, Advent was my favorite season. Let me tell you why.

At the end of November or early December, I would be pleasantly surprised to see the Advent wreath at the front of the church when I would step inside. I became excited inside and outside to know that there were only four Sunday's to wait until Christmas.

Back then, I saw Advent as a countdown, and in some ways, I think it still is. For we build the anticipation of the miracle of Christmas by reflecting upon the long wait Israel had before the Saviour arrived. We read the old prophecies and consider the patience and the wisdom of God as he slowly but surely revealed what his love was all about.

But Advent is more than looking back to a past event. It continues to be a countdown, but one looking forward. It's easy to forget that Advent is also a waiting for the return of Jesus, when the work of God will be completed and all the prophecies and revelations will be accomplished.

When we look at expecting parents, we know that gestation has to take time because many unseen things happen during these nine months, and some are seen as a mother's belly grows.

Advent reminds us that God is still at work in our midst, working in unseen ways, but also at times, in very visible ways.

Through the Holy Spirit, God still teaches us, and he continues to reveal his love to us in powerful ways. All this waiting reminds me of the words of Peter in his second letter when he said, "The Lord isn't really being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, he is patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but he wants everyone to repent."

The early church leaders had good foresight when they instituted Advent, I think. While it reminds us of the events that led to the first Christmas, reflecting on God's powerful love for us, it also helps us to anticipate that something greater is coming. Jesus will come back, and all the rejoicing that there will be when we are together with him, experiencing the full extent of his love.

May your patience for that day be renewed as you ponder upon the love your father in heaven has for you.

Children's Moment

 **Watch Video**

Transcript

The Greatest Gift

I wonder who likes gifts? Do you like gifts? Yeah, I love gifts. That's why I love this time of year. We are almost at a day where we get lots of gifts.

You know what? What if I gave you a gift? But you just took that gift and put it aside and didn't open it? Is that really a gift?

No.

Why not?

You actually have to open it.

That's true.

It's not much of a gift if you just take it and put it aside, isn't it?

Yeah.

Now, what if I gave you a gift and then I pulled out a receipt and said, "Okay, you owe me \$23.47." Is that a gift?

No.

Why not?

Because you're telling them that's how much it pays to get the gift.

That's right.

A gift is free, isn't it? Well, you know what? I am so excited for the day that's coming that we have all kinds of gifts. But you know what? The gift that we are celebrating is the gift of God's love to us in Jesus.

Christmas is all about the greatest gift ever given: Jesus. And it's a gift that's free. But it's a gift that we have to receive and open up.

Now, how do we open up Jesus? That sounds a little silly, doesn't it? Strange.

We pray to Him?

We could pray to Him. Yes.

The gift of Jesus is a gift that's free. It doesn't cost us anything at all. God won't send you a receipt, but it's a gift that if we receive it, we learn how to open up the gift of God's love everyday.

We can pray to him!

And we can pray to him, too. That's right.

So this Christmas, as you receive a gift, we can remember the greatest gift is God's love to us.



Candle lighting + Prayer Resource

Reader One:

The season for watching and waiting is over. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. This is the light of the world, and nothing cannot extinguish it.

Reader Two:

We light these candles. Because we have seen a light and we believe increasing that light does make a difference in the world around us. We light these candles because we want to be people of the light, who know a God who loved the world so much, this God chose to be born in a manger in the midst of the darkness. We light these candles as a sign of the light of the world that is coming into our darkness, and we sing with joy.

Reader One:

We light the candles of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love. And we light the light of Love as the sign of Christ's presence among us, no matter how dark it may seem.

(Light four candles on the wreath.)

Reader Two:

The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth let there be Love.



Prayer of Love

God of love

Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, your greatest gift of love to your people.

Open my heart to receive your love.

Overflow my heart with your love, so I may pour it out into the world.

Help me to love others as you have loved me

Even those who are not easy to love.

May I ever walk in your love and show the world

I am your disciple by the love I show to others.

Amen.

Intercession

Brothers and sisters,

as we joyfully await the glorious coming of the Christ, let us pray for the needs of the church, our community, and the world.

We pray in intercession for those who need to experience the love of Christ:

Family who do not know God's love

Friends who do not know God's love

Neighbours who do not know God's love

Colleagues, co-workers, classmates who

do not know God's love

God of Love,

You have given us a sign of your love through the gift of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who was promised from ages past.

We offer our prayers for your world, confident of your care and love for all creation.

Amen.

Contemplative Practice

Speak:

“A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

Read:

Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20

Reflect

Where in your community do you see signs that Christ is changing the world?

Where would you like to see more signs of change?

Who is God asking to help be a change agent for the world?

Engage:

What will you do today to share God with others?

Pray:

Gracious God, we seek you everywhere with expectant eyes that invite us to see all the people that you are calling us to love today. We praise you, O God, for the King of Kings! Amen.

Benediction

Be a people of love

Let love live in your heart and share the love of Christ with all you meet.

Share love by loving those you see regularly. Love your community.

Share love by loving those you do not know. Love others.

Share love by praying for our world.

As you go out into the world, share love, joy, hope and peace with those you meet.

Amen.