



Love – 2023 Advent Devotional

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All together... deep breath... inhale... now exhale. Feel better? Maybe you are by yourself, with your family, or with your friends. Turn on some relaxing holiday music and sit near your Advent candles.

Light your final PURPLE advent candle, the candle of LOVE.

As you sit and breathe, reflect on why you're taking some time away from your busy schedule to refocus your mind.

When have you recently felt Christ's love for you? When does your mind and heart stray away from the LOVE of Christ? What prevents you from loving others?

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for the opportunity to spend time with You. Help us block out the distractions that we have created around the holiday season and allow us to focus our minds and hearts on the truths of your word. In this time, grant us hearts of gratitude for the many blessings that you have given us. Refresh our spirits as we read of your promises and gifts. Empower us through your Spirit as we celebrate your arrival and await your return. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Read God's Word

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Luke 2:8-20 (NLT)

Something to Consider.

Unconditional love is rare. We hear the words, "unconditional love" frequently when a bride and groom recite their wedding vows. We convince ourselves that the love we have for our spouse is unconditional. But if we're honest with ourselves, it's not. There is no relationship that human beings can enter that is more tender and vulnerable than marriage, but it is still a relationship that only continues under certain conditions.

So, if marriage is the most tender and vulnerable of relationships that we can enter, and it is conditional, can we as people truly love unconditionally? I believe the answer is, "yes." The closest we can get to unconditional love is not in the marriage relationship, but in the relationship between a parent and child. A child can rebel, run away, or do terrible things. But

even if the relationship is estranged, a parent will always love their child. Even if it's the parent that makes the mistakes - breaks the relationship, pushes their kid away, creates an irreparable gap between them and their child - they will still always love that child.

If this is true, imagine how much more God loves us, His children. So much so that even amid our rebellion, He came to Earth to be born as a humble baby, grow into a perfect man, and die a death that we deserved. All of this, so that our relationship with Him no longer had to be estranged. Why did He do this? Because He LOVES us.

As followers of Jesus, who have been purchased by His blood. Through His LOVE, now have HOPE that produces in us PEACE and JOY. Christ now asks us to LOVE others as He has LOVED us.

Paul says to the church of Galatia,

²⁰ My old self has been crucified with Christ.^[a] It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for your many promises. Thank you for the LOVE that you demonstrated to us through your arrival, your sacrifice, your resurrection, and will demonstrate in your second coming. Thank you for the HOPE that provides us JOY and PEACE. We ask that during this time of waiting and anticipation of your return, you would grant us strength and perseverance that is only possible through your Holy Spirit. Fill us with this gift of LOVE and grant us opportunities to share it with those who have not yet heard about it. Let us see and LOVE others in the same way that you do.

Amen.

⁹ "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:9-13