

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20) – “Love Came Down at Christmas”

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Intro: We all love a good story and tonight we celebrate the “Greatest Story Ever Told” – the story of the incarnation. God became a man, which by any measure is the most astounding thing ever to occur, not simply in this world, but in this universe – or indeed, in any possible universe that might exist beyond this one. The story is simply told to children, as we’ve just heard; but amazing enough to capture the hearts and imagination of the oldest among us too. Here’s the way you first heard it, all those years ago in the Authorized Version:

Text: Luke 2:1–20 - *1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Beth-lehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, Good will toward men. 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Beth-lehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Exposition: It’s a simple story but its implications are anything but simplistic. What we are being told is that “Love Came Down at Christmas.” In the incarnation, the God who created all things; the self-existent, eternal, infinitely strong, completely wise, perfectly skilled, amazingly merciful, frighteningly righteous Judge – *He* became one of *us*. Someone who speaks our language; feels our pains; shares our sorrows; carried our sins; died our death, suffered our Hell; and became our future – all for one simple reason: Because He loves us.

The most famous verse in Scripture says it directly: **John 3:16** - *16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

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Because God loves, God gives, and since God has given us something – someone, really – that is how we can be sure that we are really loved by God. It’s important for us to know that God loves the world, but more important to know the answer to the question, “Does God love Me?” The answer is in His gift of love, Jesus. Let me give you five reasons – five facts that prove beyond dispute that God loves you.

Fact Number One: God’s love for you is proven because God became one of us, for your sake. The Christian message is that God became a man – the infinite, perfect, powerful, Creator, who is vast beyond the telling, stepped out of eternity and into space and time and history to become in all His fullness, a single human being – Jesus of Nazareth. This is the most astounding fact in all the world. The infinite Creator took His finite creation, Man, up into Himself at Bethlehem. Why would God do that? Let’s be clear – He gained nothing from doing that which wasn’t already His by right of creation. He needed nothing from us, and He gains nothing by becoming one of us. His motive for doing this was entirely altruistic – He did it for our sake, not for His. That is what love is. Love puts the good of the other ahead of its own good. Love does for others what others cannot possibly do for themselves. God became one of us for our sake, not for His sake, because He loves us.

What would you give up for the sake of a loved one? If the chips were down, if life was at stake, if a future of misery was in view for someone you loved and you could only save them by sacrificing your own comfort, possessions, pleasures, or even your own life – would you do it? If your loved one was living in poverty, would you give away your possessions to rescue them? If your loved one had a dread disease, would you exchange places with them? If your loved one was sunken in moral depravity of the most repulsive sort, would you meet them there in their fallenness – become like him or her – to save them from their own self-inflicted misery? You and I are the poverty stricken, diseased, morally reprobate ones, so loved by God that God in Christ exchanged all the glories of Heaven, so we could be rescued. That is love. Love came down at Christmas.

Fact Number Two: God’s love for us is proven because He came to earth to live a life for us that we couldn’t live for ourselves. Since God is holy and we are not, we have no possibility of living in His presence without pain and misery. The Bible tells us that God dwells in unapproachable light – a light so pure, so intense that for sinful men and women such as you and me, to be suddenly brought into the piercing light of His purity would be instantly blinding. His presence is so intense – *His mere presence is so intense* that for a sinful human being to stand unredeemed before Him – well, that would be Hell. Literally, hellish.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did the unthinkable. They committed treason against the Sovereign of the universe. Their sin has been imputed to each one of us, and all we rightly deserve from the hand of our Creator is instant, eternal damnation. But Adam and Eve were not instantly condemned, and in like manner neither are we. Why not? 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us why: - **21** *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* God proved His love for us in this way: Jesus came and lived on our behalf, the spotless, sinless life that God demands of all who come into His presence. Having lived that acceptable life, on the cross

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Jesus exchanged that perfect life for our sinful lives, so that now, in Him, we are made the righteousness of God. That is what love does, and that is how we know He loves us. Love came down at Christmas.

Fact Number Three: God’s love for us is proven because Jesus died for our sins. The proper penalty for sin is death. Not just physical death – it is that – but something more: eternal spiritual death; separation from God; eternal punishment in Hell. But on the cross, the Bible tells us that Jesus took all of that in our place. Jesus died physically for us, but also suffered infinitely the eternal pangs of Hell on our behalf – so we don’t have to. Who would do that for someone else? Only someone whose love drives them to the ultimate sacrifice so that another may live. Romans 5:6-8 speaks of this amazing love: **6** *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

We sometimes read the story of a heroic teacher who puts his or her body between a deranged shooter and students, or a mother who sacrifices her life to save her child from danger. We can understand this a little. We get how someone might give their life to save someone they loved, but what about those instances when someone gives their lives for a perfect stranger? The police officer who puts his body between a killer and an anonymous citizen; a soldier who risks all to defend an unknown citizen in some foreign land. Those stories connect with us because they are echoes of Calvary. We find it so admirable that anyone would do that. And that is why Grace is so amazing, isn’t it? Listen to it again, and wonder: Ephesians 2:1–5 - **1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.* We know we are loved because Jesus died for us when we didn’t deserve it at all. Love came down at Christmas.

Fact Number Four: We know we are loved by God because God raised us up with Jesus. When God raised Jesus up from the dead, He didn’t just raise Jesus, He also raised to new life all who have put their faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2:5–10 speaks of this raising: **5** *even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* When anyone puts their faith in Christ, a miracle happens: someone dead is raised to life – new life in Christ. Everyone begins life spiritually dead, because of our heritage of sin received from Adam and Eve. Those who are spiritually dead have absolutely no power to save themselves or to contribute even a little bit to their salvation. To be dead is to be completely powerless. One who is spiritually dead is cut off from God and from life. So, God does for us what we can never do for ourselves: Through Jesus’ resurrection, God spiritually raises back to life

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all who put their faith in Him. One day, He will finish our adoption as sons by raising our bodies too. But here's the point: God raised us from the dead with Jesus, not because of anything we could offer Him – He did it completely for love's sake.

When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus He wept. Those who stood with Him recognized why He was weeping for His friend, saying, *“See how he loved him!”* And they were right. God simply can't abide the idea of being separated by death from those He loves, so naturally He does what Jesus did at Lazarus' graveside – He calls the dead to life. Every time someone puts faith in Jesus, the dead are raised once again. And it is God's love at work through Jesus that does this. Here is another proof through Jesus that God loves us. Love came down at Christmas.

Fact Number Five: We know that God loves us because God invites us through Jesus to live with Him forever. Romans 10:13 tells us that **13** *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* “Saved from what?” you might ask. Saved from eternal death. Saved from being separated from God forever. Saved from endless, eternal torment and regret. Most importantly, saved from hopeless futility and brought into endless, unspeakable joy – life with God forever.

Application: How does one enter this joy, this life? It's as easy as “A, B, C.” Admit you are a sinner in need of God's boundless love. Believe that He has done everything needed to take you from death to life in Jesus Christ, His Son. Call upon the name of the Lord – cry out to Jesus, asking Him to save you. If you've never done this, let me urge you to begin tonight a life of following Jesus. Love has made it all possible. Love came down at Christmas.

Conclusion: “Love came down at Christmas.” No wonder we celebrate. My prayer for each one here tonight is that you will know the wonder of Christ's love come down to you, this Christmas.