

Christmas Meditation: "Love Came Down At Christmas"

New Testament Lesson - I John 4:7 - 16
Preached by the Rev. John H. Houdeshel
Sunday, December 25, 2008
First Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, PA

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way; God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us.

"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Holy Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent His Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us."

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God, through Whose inspiration we have these words, we ask now that You will abide with us and guide us as we meditate upon them. On this most holy day, may we ponder anew the wonder of the way in which You have come into this world in the same way as each of us did - by being born of a woman, and thus entering into our human experience. May we see again in this act of Thine the fullest demonstration of Your love for us. In the Name of Him Who is the Living Word, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

"Love came down at Christmas; Love all lovely, Love divine;

Love was born at Christmas; Star and angels gave the sign."

That's the way in which the poet, Christina Rossetti described the first Christmas. As I have pondered her words over the years, I have experienced a growing appreciation for them. In this meditation before we share in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, I am glad to have this opportunity to share my ponderings with you.

By its very definition, anything which is born is brand-new. There has never been anything exactly like it before. Thus when the poet makes the statement that "Love was born at Christmas," I have to ask how it is that Love was all of a sudden brand new at that time when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea? How, or in what sense was it new? Such questions necessarily lead me back to the revelation of God which we have in the books of the Old Testament. After all, the writers are setting forth the story of the same God Who is in a personal relationship with His people. Was there no love there?

There surely was from God's side. This was seen in the provision which He made for our first parents. They had adequate food, and as long as they were in a state of innocence, they had no need for clothing. Once that innocence was lost, God provided clothing for them, although it required the death of other creatures so that their skins could be used. That was the first sacrifice required for humans' sin. That unhappy story seems to be perpetuated from generation to generation. By and large, the love of God is spurned with the result that there is no peace between human beings and God nor between the human beings themselves.

In time, through His servant, Moses, God made the directions extremely specific with two very basic commands: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." And later, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But, although we

give mental assent and recognize that obedience to these two basic commands would solve our problems in our relationship to God and other human beings, we do not seem to have the spiritual strength and stamina to do that. We read that even one whom we regard as living on a very high spiritual plane as the Apostle Paul, has to make the confession: "I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do." (Romans 7:19)

Into that dismal situation, God did a brand-new thing. He came to earth in the Person of His only-begotten Son. And how did He come? In the very same way in which you and I did - by being born of a woman, as a helpless and vulnerable infant in the lowliest of circumstances, His first crib being a feed trough for animals. Thus "Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine; Love was born at Christmas, Star and angels gave the sign."

When grown, He gave us a demonstration of that love in action in His miracles of healing and in His teachings, and supremely in His suffering a sacrificial death for us in obedience to the will of the Father. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins;" for "Greater love has no one than this - that He will lay down His life for His friends." And what He asks of us is that we remember Him and what He has done for us – in effect, "Promise you won't forget Me." Which is exactly what we intend to do now in response to that Love which was born on that first Christmas so long ago. Amen.

Let us pray: God of love and mercy and grace, we thank You for Your patience with us. As we remember Your infinite love as revealed in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Your only - begotten Son, Jesus, the Christ, may this be an expression of our love to You. May this Sacrament be indeed a means of grace for us which, by Your Holy Spirit, will enable us to love You and one another also. May the love which was born on that first Christmas be born in our hearts today, for Jesus' sake. Amen.