

Opening Carol:

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th’ angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”

Christ, by highest heaven adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th’ incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”

We come now to the 4th week of Advent—having lit on the first weekend the Candle of Hope, the second week the Candle of Peace, and then last week the Candle of Joy—today we light the Candle of Love---- Remembering that God’s unconditional love has come to each one of us in Jesus Christ; and Christ calls us to live this love towards all others.

The candles are lit.

John 13:34

“Jesus said to them, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“What Child is This?”

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

Chorus:

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.

Chorus

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

Chorus

Devotional:

“The unabashed eros of lovers, the sympathetic philia of friends, agape giving itself away freely no less for the murderer than for his victim (the King James version translates it as charity)—these are all varied manifestations of a single reality. To lose yourself in another’s arms, or in another’s company, or in suffering for all men who suffer, including the ones who inflict suffering upon you—to lose yourself in such ways is to find yourself. Is what it’s all about. Is what love is.

Of all powers, love is the most powerful and the most powerless. It is the most powerful because it alone can conquer that final and most impregnable stronghold which is the human heart. It is the most powerless because it can do nothing except by consent....

In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion but an act of the will....in Jesus’ terms, we can love our neighbors without necessarily liking them. In fact liking them may stand in the way of loving them by making us overprotective sentimentalists instead of reasonably honest friends.

When Jesus talked to the Pharisees, he didn’t say, ‘There, there. Everything’s going to be all right.’ He said, ‘You brood of vipers! How can you speak good when you are evil?’ (Matthew 12:34) And he said that to them because he loved them.

That doesn’t mean that liking may not be part of loving, only that it doesn’t have to be.” (Excerpted from Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, pp. 64-65.)

Reflect or Discuss:

1. In what ways have people made it harder for you to believe in God’s love? In what ways have they brightened your life with God’s love?
2. How does the Christmas story about the God of the universe choosing to be born as a poor child in a manger, to live, die and rise again for your sake, speak to you about the depths of God’s love for you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this day, this week, this holy season is a gift of love from you. Grant me the insight to keep learning about and exploring how deeply you love me and my world. Amen.

“We Three Kings”

We three kings of orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

Chorus:

O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright

Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice!
Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia
Sounds through the earth and skies.