**First Things First ABC’s of The Christian Life**

Jesus, God’s Gift Of Himself -- Advent, Week Four

God loves us: Why is it so hard to believe? Luke 1:46-55

**The Problem:** Pride boasts we are beyond the need of God’s love; false humility whispers we are beyond its reach.

“My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.” Luke 1:47

 If salvation is free, then why don’t all accept it? If it’s all by grace, then why does Jesus tell us that we should strive to enter it? The Bible is clear that the Gospel of the New Covenant is the greatest of all possible messages. Yet, 2000 years after His first coming, the opposition to Jesus and His Church is greater than ever before. If the riches of God’s love in Christ perfectly answer to the poverty of man’s lostness, what prevents mankind from receiving Jesus, the gift of God with us?

**The Solution:** The spring of Love originating in the eternal Trinity floods all Creation, giving life to all humble enough to drink, and mocking all whose pride rejects that love to find satisfaction anywhere else.

“That the world may know that you sent me, and loved them even as you loved me.” John 17:23

 Mary knows not only that God is her Savior, but that she needs saving (vv. 46-48). This Savior is holy, but merciful across many generations, elevating the humble, but justly destroying the arrogant and proud (vv. 49-52). He satisfies those hungry for Him, but the independent and self-sufficient are left with nothing (v. 53). And in spite of their rebellion, this Savior-God helps Israel because of the promises He made to their fathers (Abraham, *et al.*, vv. 54, 55). So, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34. People reject God’s love because of pride (I don’t need it!) and/or unbelief (God isn’t telling us the truth.)

**The Dynamic:** The Eternal Spring of Divine Love

“You loved me before the foundation of the world.” John 17:24

 If the love of God were something God possessed, then it might come and go. But if love is something that God IS, then it is as eternal as He is and as faithful, just, kind, and holy. This gives us great confidence to believe. Why? Because God can not lie, betray Himself, or go contrary to His nature. Salvation depends upon His character and works, not our own! As a result, it is safe to believe what God says about Himself, and submit to His care (as does Mary), but very foolhardy and self-destructive to oppose Him. Both ruses for not receiving God’s gift (pride and unbelief) are consumed in the white-hot love of Father, Son, and Spirit.

**Believing God’s Love:**  Five realities about God’s love for His own. 1 John 4:16

1. God is love. 1 John 4:8, 16 in contrast to Genesis 3:4, 5; 1 John 5:10-12

 Beware: To refuse or deny God’s love for any reason is the evil essence of unbelief, not only an attack on God’s character, but His very nature.

2. God can not love us any more than He does already. Romans 8:31-39

 The gift of Himself in His Son proved that beyond all doubt. John 15:13, 14

3. God does not love us any less if we sin. Romans 8:1-4; Psalm 103; Isaiah 55

 If our sin has been paid for in Christ, He no longer holds it against us. 1 John 1:8–2:2 However, He disciplines His own. Heb. 12:1-11

4. God’s love produces a love response and obedience in the beloved. 1 John 4:10, 19

 God’s love has begun to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ, who loves and obeys His Father. Romans 8:28-30; 1 John 2:3-5

5. God’s love produces self-sacrificial love in us. 1 John 3:16; 4:11-13, 20, 21

 Jesus’ “New Commandment” was not merely to love, but to love “as I have loved you.” God’s love is an invitation to die (to sin and self) and be resurrected with Christ. John 13:12-20; 31-35; Rom. 6; 8:12-18

***God’s eternal love, fully revealed in His Son, radiates into all creation, inviting the humble to follow His example of obedient, self-sacrificing love, and warning the proud not to doubt God’s nature, but embrace it.***