

Week Three of Advent: A Love That Comes Close

Text: *Luke 1:26–38*

When Love Makes the First Move

Have you ever noticed that some of the most beautiful expressions of love are the ones that *move first*?

- The friend who calls even after you've drifted apart.
- The spouse who apologizes even when you both know it wasn't really their fault.
- The parent who rushes in before a child even knows they need help.

Love moves first — that's part of what makes it love.

Personal anecdote prompt:

A few weeks ago, we made a trip to Morgantown to take our son in for a consultation for his foot. Instead of scheduling a quick surgery here in town, we chose to go talk to someone else just to be certain. While we were getting ready to make the trip, coordinating family schedules and all that goes with it, we were surprised by some friends whose love came toward us. Road snacks were dropped off unexpectedly. It was a lovely grace of God, a tender mercy of his love surprising us – moving toward us.

I am sure you all have stories when you were surprised by love – when love unexpectedly moved toward you. When love came close to you.

Advent is the story of a God who moves first.

A God who does not wait for us to come to Him...

but a God who comes *to us*.

Last week we saw God preparing the world through the miraculous birth of John. This week, the story shifts from *preparation* to *fulfillment*.

From the announcement of a prophet...

to the announcement of a Savior.

And Luke 1:26–38 shows us the most breathtaking truth of Advent:

Love doesn't stay distant. Love draws near. (read text)

READING THE TEXT: LUKE 1:26–38

1. THE GOD WHO ACTS: Love Makes the First Move

(*Luke 1:26–29*)

Luke tells us that **God sent** the angel Gabriel.

Not Mary searching for God.

Not humanity forcing God into action.

No — *God initiates*.

Digging into Scripture: God isn't impulsive. This is not a last second Christmas gift idea for the world. This is part of the redemptive plan to save the world. Luke makes that clear.

- “*In the sixth month*” — Luke roots this story in real time, connecting Jesus' story to John's. God's plan is unfolding step by step.
- “*God sent the angel Gabriel*” — the same messenger who announced John's birth now brings an even greater message. These messages come from a shared messenger, a shared source.
- “*To a virgin... engaged to a man named Joseph... the virgin's name was Mary*” — Luke highlights her smallness, ordinariness, obscurity. This is certainly unexpected.

When people plan, it is grand. It is the prophet Samuel looking at the impressive physical attributes of Saul and then Jesse's oldest sons. It is Saul layering his armor onto David's body.

When people plan, it is often born from desperation. It is Abraham and Sarah taking matters into their own hands instead of waiting on God and going Hagar. It is Rebekah and Jacob deceiving Isaac and defrauding Esau out of his blessing. God wasn't desperate and Jesus wasn't the last chance.

God had a plan born out of his love for us. It was not born out of desperation. It was not hastily slapped together with spiritual bailing wire and duct tape. God had a plan for salvation.

But from the beginning, God's plan for salvation has been an outlier. Bethlehem, some small backwater village. That is God's chosen place, prophesied by Micah.

John is born to an ordinary, regular old priest. Not the king of Israel. Not a high priest. Just an ordinary Levite married to an ordinary Levite. And now this message to Mary. The Son of God is to be born to this young, teenage nobody. God doesn't appear to a woman in Jerusalem on Solomon's porch. He appears to this teenager in Nazareth. Nothing could be further from Jerusalem.

God doesn't begin his plan in palace halls or capital cities. He begins in Nazareth — a place people joked about. He begins with a teenage girl nobody knew.

Why?

Because **God's love goes any and everywhere. God's love will go to the surprising places no one else considers or even highly values.** God's love goes to those the world might overlook.

Juan and Ed

I've told the story of Juan and Ed before. Their parents brought them into the country as little children from Honduras. Eventually both would become naturalized citizens in middle school. The first time I met Juan, his older brother Ed was really concerned that his brother become a Christian so I paid Juan a visit. He cussed me out and asked me to leave. Later, Juan would become a Christian.

And Juan and Ed would accompany our youth on trips to a partnership we had in Peru as translators. And it was on one of those trips where Juan, out on a soccer field up in a small village in the Andes, translated the gospel for an entire village. Juan never, ever thought he would be the mouthpiece through which the gospel would be shared with an entire village. He went from cussing me out to speaking words of life. Despite Juan feeling unworthy, unimportant, we saw immense value in him. We never expected Juan to "level up" as a human. We came to him where he was and wanted him to use what he could. He didn't have to fix himself.

God did not expect us to fix ourselves. He didn't expect us to save ourselves. His love meant a surprising plan involving an elderly couple's miraculous conception. His love meant a surprising message to a teenage nobody who came from nowhere. We are reminded once again that God's plan was not us climbing, efforting, our way to the top of the mountain. It was His Love manifested incarnationally in Jesus.

Advent is not humanity climbing up to God.

Advent is not humanity earning God's love.

Advent is God descending in love to us.

Advent is God's love coming close to us.

Love acts. Love initiates. Love arrives before we ask.

2. FAITH AND SUBMISSION: Love Says Yes Even When We Don't Understand

(Luke 1:30–34, 38)

Gabriel gives Mary the most astounding message in history:

“Do not be afraid...

You have found favor with God...

You will conceive...

You will bear a son...

He will be great...

He will be the Son of the Most High...”

Every phrase is overflowing with grace, power, promise, and destiny.

Mary has a reasonable question:

“How can this be?”

Not doubt — but honest confusion.

Not rebellion — but real humanity.

Digging into Scripture:

- Gabriel's “Do not be afraid” is *not* a rebuke — it's reassurance.
- “*Favor*” (charis) means grace — unearned, undeserved love.

- Mary's "How can this be?" echoes Abraham in Genesis 15 and Zechariah in Luke 1 — but unlike Zechariah, Mary's question stems from wonder, not unbelief.
- Mary's final response, "I am the Lord's servant," is the hinge of the whole story — humble surrender to God's initiative.

Mary models joy-filled, trust-filled obedience.

She doesn't know the details.

She doesn't know the cost.

She doesn't know the future.

She only knows **the One who is asking** — and that is enough.

There is someone here this morning who feels a tug on their heart, a pull on their spirit. Some sort of radical call of obedience — something so far beyond your comfort zone, beyond your expectations. And before you will say yes to the Lord, you have determined to wait on details, wait on your timing, wait on the kids' sports schedule, wait on something still to happen.

It is not that impressive to obey God in the certainty and comfort of familiar. But that is what most Christians desire. It is why we are so afraid of change, so afraid of different music, so afraid of losing what we've known. Because it has become easier to obey God in the certainty and the comfort of the familiar.

What about Luke 1 and 2 is familiar? What is comfortable? None of it is. Elderly pregnancy? Immaculate conception? Jesus from Nazareth? Born in Bethlehem?

What is certain about it? Only that God is sovereign and He does what he wants. So, if the Lord is leading you, calling you to something uncertain, something unfamiliar, calling you to deeper faith in the middle of the unknown, your **ONLY** response according to Scripture is "I am your servant." The only appropriate response is love.

Love responds. Love trusts. Love says "yes" even when the road ahead is unclear.

3. GOD'S POWER OVER CIRCUMSTANCES: Love Makes the Impossible Possible

(*Luke 1:35–37*)

Gabriel explains the miracle:

- The Holy Spirit will come upon you.
- The power of the Most High will overshadow you.
- The child will be holy — the Son of God.

Then Gabriel reveals something that affirms that God is working and moving in surprising ways:

- And Elizabeth — barren and old — is already six months pregnant.

One of my old standby chestnuts of joking is to tease someone who is pushing the big 4-0 about having that baby. I realize that is not something that God will most likely call people to. However, there may very well be something else the Lord is leading you to do, and it SEEMS as improbable and impossible as that old-age pregnancy that Elizabeth and Zechariah faced.

You consider whatever it is — perhaps taking a step of real faith with your finances and actually giving a tithe; maybe making a career shift; or maybe the Lord is speaking to your heart about salvation today! Those decisions may have seemed impossible, but God's love has a way of making impossible things happen. Listen to Gabriel speak to Mary here.

He says the line that opens heaven:

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” (1:37)

This is not a cliché.

This is the beating heart of Christmas.

- “*Overshadow*” is the same word used for God's presence filling the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35). God's glory will indwell and fill Mary just like it did in the tabernacle.

- Elizabeth's pregnancy is the sign — the confirmation that God is doing something unprecedented.

What is it that you are convinced that disqualifies you from considering whatever it is that the Lord is calling you to do today? Is it your discomfort? Is it some limitation within you, based on fear? Our limits and weaknesses reveal the sovereignty and strength of God. Look at Luke 1. God intentionally pairs human limitation (virginity, barrenness, old age) with divine power (Spirit, glory, Son of God).

God's love is not constrained by human limitations.
He works beyond biology, beyond probability, beyond possibility.

God works in the impossible: healing a body. Restoring a friendship or a marriage. Making a provision that made no sense. Providing a moment in which God overcame a barrier that nobody thought was moving.

Because God's love doesn't give up. It never fails and never ends.
Because God's love doesn't run from obstacles. It oftentimes overcomes them in his sovereignty.
Because God's love is stronger than every impossible circumstance.

Today we light the third candle — the Candle of Love.

We do not light it because we love God perfectly.
We light it because **He loved us first.** (1 John 4:19)

We do not light it because we understand His plan.
We light it because **Mary's Son is God's plan.**

We do not light it because life feels easy.
We light it because **God's love is powerful enough for the impossible.**

Advent is God's love moving toward us.
Mary's "yes" teaches us how to welcome that love.
God's power shows us that nothing can stop that love.

A LOVE THAT INVITES

Mary's response becomes our invitation today:

“I am the Lord’s servant. May Your word to me be fulfilled.”

So here is the Advent call of love:

- Let God’s love initiate something new in you.
- Let God’s love override your fears.
- Let God’s love empower your obedience.
- Let God’s love make the impossible possible in your life.
- Let God’s love turn your uncertainty into surrender.

Love moves first.

Love invites a response.

Love makes room.

Love says “yes.”

CONCLUSION — “Love Came Down”

If your life feels uncertain —

if the future feels unclear —

if you’re waiting in the dark —

if you’re longing for answers —

hear the message of Advent:

God’s Love has come.

His Love is here.

His Love is sufficient. It is more than enough.

And His love will carry you. Securely. Certainly. Tightly.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank You for a love that moves first, a love that comes close, a love that calls us to participate in Your story. Give us the faith of Mary, the courage to say “yes,” and the confidence to believe that nothing is impossible with You. Let this Advent season awaken us again to Your unstoppable, unchanging, unimaginable love in Christ. Amen.