

Love at Christmas and for All Eternity

Every year, as the calendar turns to December, people reach out to others with the Christmas spirit. It is an extraordinary effort this time of year. Christmas cards arrive in the mail; people step up their giving to angel trees, food drives, and other charitable causes. Office parties and Christmas celebrations bring universal smiles to everyone around us. Christmas goodies are exchanged with neighbors. Parents and grandparents look forward to giving gifts not only to the children in the family but also to each other. In some cases, the family gathering can be similar to the return of the Prodigal Son, when we express our love to family members who live a distance away or may have drifted away. Christmas is a time of love and anticipation of what is to come.



Paul's letter to the Romans tells the members of the church in Rome: *Love each other with genuine affection and delight in honoring each other (Romans 12:10)*. The joy of the Christmas season brings love to the forefront of our lives.

This weekend – Christmas Eve and Christmas Day -- is the peak of the celebration. We look forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. For the past four weeks, our churches have been reminding us that Jesus came to earth to give us Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love. The center of it all is the Christ candle, representing Jesus Christ as the center of our lives. As the shepherds and magi assembled at the manger in Bethlehem, no one knew the gravity of what was to come. Jesus was born in the most humble of settings. One of my favorite Christmas anthems, *Mary Did You Know*, has a prophetic line directed to Mary, "This child you delivered will soon deliver you." Can you imagine Mary's emotion as she delivered the Savior of the world?

What Jesus came to do in this earthly world was an act of pure love. Throughout His ministry, He had compassion for the sick, dying, and afflicted. He opposed sinful deeds and yet forgave people of their sins. His sacrificial, painful death was an act of love that paved the way for believers to have eternal life.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). This verse is written for us today. Because of Jesus, our lives will never be the same. The gifts we give on Christmas morning symbolize the gift of love that Jesus gave us. The tree we decorate with lights and ornaments symbolizes the tree of Jesus' crucifixion. The tree is the focal point of the Christmas celebration in our homes, just as Jesus is the focal point of our lives. The Christmas lights that shine brightly inside and outside our house represent Christ's light to our world. The fact that we feature light in our yards represents Christ's love shining through us.

When the presents are unwrapped and the decorations stored away, we know that Christmas is not the end of the story. Instead, it is just the beginning. Our Hope is not wishful thinking but the anticipation that Jesus is coming again, as He said He would. The celebration of Christmas today is more than the season of Advent and the 12 days of Christmas, but the knowledge that God promises to be with us always – in this life and the next.

Celebrate God's love for us and share that love with others so they, too, will know that Jesus is the Savior of the world – now and forever. Merry Christmas!

Prayer: My prayer for you is that the Christmas celebration will remind you of His love for you, now and always. Amen.