



O Come, O Come

The Second Sunday of Advent

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 (NIV)

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given...

Isaiah 9:6a (NIV)

Love gives. By its very nature, love must share and be shared. So of course, the God who is love would express that love by giving. Every sunrise, every flower, every newborn child is a gift of immense value and beauty. How much more the loving gift of God's own Son given to us?

Christmas is the celebration of that gift of love. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given..." And as we move through Advent, toward that celebration, we are reminded by everything around us of gifts and giving. Whether it's advertisements on television, displays in stores, or none-too-subtle hints from our loved ones, gifts are on everyone's mind.



I love giving gifts. When I was in my teens, twenties, and thirties, as early as January or February I would start looking for Christmas presents for my friends and family. One year I even gave my friends gifts for *my* birthday.

In the West, by and large, most of us have more stuff than we will ever need. So, several years ago I started utilizing organizations like the Heifer Project and Oxfam, through which I could make a donation to help the less privileged in a friend's honor – a double gift, as it were. I also started giving food gifts – homemade goodies, locally sourced treats, things that wouldn't sit around collecting dust and cluttering homes but would still express my love to the recipients.

Of course, not everyone's love language is giving gifts, but we can all understand how giving a gift is an expression of love. Perhaps that's because we are created in the image of the God of love, the God who gives.

God gave us the gift of His son. That is love beyond measure, and certainly beyond what most of us will ever give. But love doesn't have to give extravagantly. We can show our love by giving a pat on the back, a few words of appreciation or encouragement, or even just a smile. The point is that love gives, and Advent is the perfect time to practice that.



In what ways have I seen God's love in the past week?

What can I give to express my love and God's love to those around me?

Exercise

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the passage below, stopping at any words or phrases that catch your attention. Sit with the word or phrase, meditating on it and asking God to show you why this word or phrase caught your attention. After you've meditated on the thing that caught your attention, continue reading the passage, stopping at any other words or phrases that strike you, and discussing with the Lord what you've noticed.
3. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
4. Slowly read the passage a second time, again pausing when something catches your attention. This time ask God to show you what He wants you to know or do in light of the word or phrase that you've noticed. Wait to hear what the Lord may put into your heart or mind. (You may sense a strong impression or just what seems to be a fleeting thought. Don't dismiss anything.)
5. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
6. Slowly read the passage a third time, just letting God's Word soak into you.
7. Finally, sit quietly for a bit, and allow God to continue to work in you.

John 15:9-17 (NIV)

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.