

December 24, 2017
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent – Christmas Eve
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 1:26-38

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 1:26–38 (ESV)

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Ralph Waldo Emerson who once said: “Every artist was first an amateur.” I believe that – whether we’re talking about a singer or musician, a painter or a poet, a sculptor or an architect.

Me, I’m still an amateur in a few of those areas, including when it comes to wrapping gifts, I’m far from an artist. Gift bags rank right up there with sliced bread, they do for me anyway.

However, I’ve clumsily wrapped many a gift for my mom for grandmother and they never complained. The gifts were wrapped in love and to them, that’s what mattered, because the gifts were opened and that was followed by a hug, full of love. It’s one thing to wrap gifts. It’s quite another to wrap someone in love.

Our Gospel lesson today is known as the Annunciation. It of course is all about God sending the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary with some pretty incredible news. She has been chosen to be the one who will carry and give birth to the Messiah. But first Gabriel must explain things to Mary. This will not be an ordinary man with extraordinary gifts. No, this Child is to be named Jesus and will be called “*Son of the Most High*.” He will reign over His people “*forever*.”

Still, Mary is puzzled on a couple of levels. From a very human perspective, how can she be giving birth to anyone considering her lack of participation in the very activity which brings about children?

And from a faith perspective, she had to be wondering what God's messenger was talking about? How can He be called Son of the Most High? How can He reign forever?

Only God can reign forever!

It is at this point that Gabriel explains ... This is all a God thing. The Holy Spirit will "overshadow" you. It gives the image of being totally covered or enveloped in the love of God. This God, Who so loved the world (John 3:16) gives us His Son. Or as Isaiah 9 puts it: "*Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given.*"

Mary is chosen to be a part of this giving of love in a way that was never seen before, nor will be seen again.

The Son of the Most High and child of the Virgin Mary will be God's testament of love for all the world—a fallen world in need of a Savior.

If we pick up the imagery of 1 John 4, we are told that God is Love Himself. He is love's substance and essence, so to give birth to God's Son is to give birth to Love Himself.

Therefore, according to John, if we are connected to this God who showed His love by sending His one and only Son into the world, we too will love as He is love. We love because He first loved us.

Ultimately the love we give expression to is not found in pretty wrapped gifts, but in our love of God and for others through Christ. Wrapped presents are good, but wrapping others in love is better and sharing the love of God is the best.

In the talent of wrapping gifts, people who are precise can leave those gifts looking both beautiful and professionally done, almost to the point of not knowing how to unwrap them.

But what happens when you have a gift that is not easy to package or wrap?

In a way this is exactly the kind of gift Christmas brings us.

The love of God is far too big and far too hard to wrap our minds around.

It is a love beyond measure, so if we think we can easily box it, wrap it and put a bow on it, then we may end up shortchanging God's Love.

We wrap gifts as an expression of love, but how much more important it is to wrap **someone** in love?

It may be that simple hug when no words can express or take away that hurt or grief the other is experiencing.

It may be that well timed note of support or encouragement.

It may be expressed in time together when loneliness becomes unbearable.

There are so many ways to wrap another in love, but in all of them, Christ is living in and through us.

Mary goes on to talk about how God blesses and loves the lowly and the humble, the poor and the downtrodden.

Like Mary, we cannot forget there are people all around us who need to be wrapped in love.

Are we praying that God opens up even more opportunities for us to love others through Him?

No matter how sloppy nor how prettily wrapped, presents are really nice, to give and to receive. But the gift of love is best wrapped in the arms of the one giving it.

I pray, that by God's grace found only in His Son Jesus that we can do more and more to wrap more and more people in His love.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

From Wrapping Gifts to Wrapping Someone in Love

Luke 1:26-38

- I. Wrapping gifts.
- II. Sending gifts of Love.
- III. Wrapping Love.