

# Arrival: Love

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, December 22nd, 2024. Is everyone ready for Christmas? I've been asked that a few times this morning. I'm really not, really, really not.
- So we have, having this service this morning, I kind of skidded into getting this ready, and then Christmas Eve. So Connor and I will be hard at work on Christmas Eve, not on Christmas Eve, but in preparation for Christmas Eve.
- So you can pray for us. Because we have some work to do yet. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here. A few announcements and a few things that I wanted to cover.
- We received a love gift, an offering that was taken by the congregation and presented to us on behalf of you. And so grateful for that, very grateful for that, and humbled by it.
- And so thank you. Thank you so much for that. For everyone who is asking or prayed for me on Wednesday, I had an MRI at the crack of dawn on Wednesday morning.
- [ 1 : 0 6 ] It was interesting because they had to recalibrate all the equipment. Apparently, I have a pretty magnetic personality. At least, I'm pretty positive that's what they had to do there.
- So, yeah, there's another slight one. That's a B. That was a B joke. So I don't know the results yet. So you can be praying for that to come probably in the next few days.
- I'll know. I'm pretty confident that it's a boy. Wow. Wow. I had one boy, and now I'm giving him away. So if anyone's interested, if anyone is interested.
- So I will be on vacation after our service on Christmas Eve until January 6th. At our congregational meeting a few weeks ago, I had a, you know, I have a tendency to slip on dates.
- I think I said January 26th or something like that, and Larry was right up front, and he looked at me like, what? I just said, oh, did I? Oh, I said, no, 6th, 6th, sorry, sorry.
- [ 2 : 0 6 ] And I'm taking Michelle and Connor with me on a vacation. So we're not going anywhere. It sounds so exotic. Paul will be our guest preacher. Paul Hay will be our guest preacher on Sunday, December 29th, and Sunday, January 5th.
- So in the newsletter this week, I worked ahead, and we've got the outline, just brief description summaries of those two sermons so you can look ahead and know what those will be.
- So there won't be an e-newsletter coming on December 26th or January 2nd, so you won't, if you don't get it, don't think you missed out somehow. I kind of front-loaded some information in this week's newsletter.
- The phone line and the website will also not be updated until the week of January 6th because I'm away, and I updated the website when I was away in Banff, and it's not that fun, so I think everyone will survive.
- So Christmas Eve, speaking of that, join us right here on Tuesday afternoon at 4 p.m. for Christmas is about receiving. And I think you'll want to be here for an evening of singing, short drama, candlelight, and some good time spent together, and treats, by the way.

[ 3 : 21 ] And you missed the Christmas joke in there, think it through, and maybe it'll come to you later. All right, I said you'll want to be here. On each Sunday of the Advent season, we've been lighting candles to recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us, hope, peace, joy, and love.

And this morning, as we continue, we're concluding, actually, the season of Advent. We're lighting our first candle again, which represents... Oh, good. Not even prompted. Very nice.

Why is my hand so shaky? Good question. Our second candle, which represents... Nice. Well done, all theology graduates.

Our third candle, which represents... Oh, sorry. Yeah, joy, thank you. The pink one, which we light on what Sunday? Anybody remember?

No, Godete Sunday. Close, though. But yes, the third Sunday. And our final candle, which represents... Love.

[ 4 : 29 ] And so the center candle, why am I not lighting that? Because it is known as the... Christ candle. Excellent. You can say. The Christ candle.

So we light that on Christmas Eve to signify to us that Jesus has come. Today, like shepherds, we watch for signs of the Messiah's birth. We celebrate the good news that was proclaimed to all people, saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth.

Peace to those on whom his favor rests. We reflect on the wonder of the manger, which represents God's rescue mission, to come and save us, his beloved children.

Today, we've got a great reason to celebrate, because it is only three days until Christmas. And if you're doing the math, I counted this partial day, so don't panic.

So we all know that Christmas morning is the morning that we look back and remember that Christ was born. He arrived. He arrived. And arrival is the specific event of the entire season that Advent leads us to.

[ 5 : 40 ] The moment that Jesus was born. And with him came all the prophetic hope and promise of a Messiah to redeem the people of God. Hope is a powerful thing, as we learned in week one of this series.

Peace is also available through Jesus as the fulfillment of our hope, as we learned in week two. And last week, we read in Luke two that he brings good news of great joy.

Jesus is the reason for the season. We also have talked about that. And the reason that we can be filled with joy in the middle of the chaos that can come in this season.

That can come in any season of our lives at times. Today, we reflect on the source behind all of it. Now, we look at the fourth candle of the Advent season and recognize it as love, representing love.

But really, when you think about it, the driving force behind all of it, hope and joy and peace, is love. It's the gift of Jesus that came out of God's great love for us.

[ 6 : 51 ] It was what motivated the Father to give his only Son to a weary world to cause us to rejoice. Now, close your eyes for a moment.

I want you to think about all the people in your life that you love. The ones that you love truly and deeply. The ones that you love unconditionally and without hesitation or reservation.

Do you have some names or faces in mind? Now, out of that deep and dedicated love that you have for that person or those people, is there anything that you would not do for them?

Open your eyes. I'm still here. We love people for all kinds of reasons, don't we? We may love them for who they are to us, our relationship with them.

We may love them for the history and experiences that we've shared with them. Or sometimes we even just love someone back because we know that they love us.

[ 8 : 02 ] And I believe it's often a combination of these things, isn't it? It's a combination of some or all of these things that play into our love for another person. Isn't it amazing how powerful love can be?

Love is an incredibly powerful force, and some would argue that is the most powerful and beautiful thing in the world. The New Testament has a lot to say about love.

But today, as we seek to understand the motives behind Jesus' arrival, I want us to focus on what is likely, if not the most often quoted verse of all time.

We hear it a lot. John 3.16 says, We've heard this verse before.

We even recognize that we've seen it displayed at sporting events. I had to think back a bit to why that is. It's because, in some parts of the world, people are not afraid to publicly declare their faith.

[ 9 : 19 ] John 3.16, displayed proudly by football players in the NFL, is a statement of their faith. It's a statement of that core message of the gospel.

Now, obviously, most of us can recite it from memory. And in fact, we said it together last week. We just said it again this morning. And this one verse, I believe, answers the question, Why did God send Jesus?

Right? It answers it pretty succinctly, I think. He did it because, as John 3.16 tells us, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that unbelievable sacrifice, that whoever believes in him, in Jesus, shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3.16. What about 1 John 4.10? And you may know it as well. Folks, this, to me, is Advent love.

This is the deep love of the Father. In the words of John 4.10, it says, This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[ 10 : 37 ] See, God took the initiative towards us. He took the first step. And it was a massive one, wasn't it? He offered up the greatest gift the world has ever known, and our job is simply to receive, teaser for Christmas Eve, receive this gift with joy.

Receive the gift. So there are different ways people receive gifts, right? You've seen a child or a grandchild around the Christmas tree on Christmas morning or Christmas Eve or a week before Christmas, eagerly watching, right?

We still do this in our house sometimes. I have adult children who will notice when a new present is under the Christmas tree and it's like, who's that for?

Check the labels, little bit of density, lifting happens. Other people, do you become jaded? Like, do you have the conversation as you get older, I don't need anything.

What do you want for Christmas? I don't need anything. I don't want anything. Or do you even become apathetic? You open a gift and kind of go, hmm, never going to use this.

[ 11 : 56 ] Won't ever read this. Don't eat these. Eee. Ah, thank you. Right? That awkward receiving. So how do you receive gifts?

Do you receive them with joy and excitement or something else? If you've given your life to Christ, do you remember what it first felt like when you received the gift of salvation and forgiveness?

Were you overcome with joy? Do you reflect on it periodically and does that same joy well up in you? If, hopefully, if you reflect on it during the holidays, Christmas season, how does it make you feel?

Are you still filled with humble gratitude and joy over this gift? Or has its value and significance begun to fade for you over time?

I think it's something important that we need to think about, that we all need to reflect on for ourselves. Because the way we perceive and value this gift and how it shapes our words and actions, see, there's a natural progression that should come, those things, the way we receive the gift, the way we act and speak as a result of them, speaks powerfully about the state of our heart.

[ 13 : 25 ] People don't tend to grumble when they're filled with joy. People don't tend to criticize when gratitude is their starting point. So if love was the motive behind the gift of Jesus, if God took the initiative to give this gift, then what responsibility do we have to receive it well?

Well, I would argue that of all the gifts a person could receive in life, this is the greatest one. It's not even close.

This is the one that really matters most. And if it's a gift that you've already received, then this is the perfect time to reflect on it again, to consider the magnificent love of God expressed to you when he gave humanity and gave you his son.

Because this is Advent love. As 1 John, that passage from 1 John says, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Can you hold that one with you? What about sharing the love? For most of us, we probably can't wait to tell others about gifts that we receive, especially if they're good ones, right?

[ 14 : 50 ] We talked about the eh gifts. If it's a good one, you want to share it. Talk about it. But probably one of, if not the most amazing gift I have ever received, except for Jesus, right?

I have to give you the pastor caveat, was scuba diving lessons that Michelle arranged for me several years ago. So we had gone on a trip to Turks and Caicos, and we are not wealthy.

We were taken as a treat by Michelle's sister. And we went snorkeling one afternoon because I like the water. You know what? Though I have never been around the ocean as much as we were on this trip, and I realized just how salty it is.

And I thought to myself, this is the worst surprise ever. The ocean is super salty. What a bummer. So maybe that's, maybe you're going, what is wrong with this guy? But the first time I got splashed in the ocean, I thought, yeah, I'm in the, what the heck?

It's so salty. And Michelle said, it's the ocean, man. I said, well, I expected it to be fresh water, I guess. Anyway. But I enjoyed snorkeling well enough.

[ 15 : 57 ] It was fine. But I had this compelling urge in me from the moment we started to do it that I wanted to be down there. I wanted to be far below the surface in this amazing world that seemed to be waiting in the deep.

So while we were still on our trip, I went on a one-day scuba excursion a few days later, and folks, I absolutely fell in love with it. And then we got home.

I forgot all about it. And then it was a complete surprise to me that when we returned home, Michelle had arranged for me to take lessons. Take lessons to become certified as a scuba diver.

So that gift showed that she loved me. It showed that she had seen the joy that this activity had brought to me. She wanted to encourage and support me in exploring it further.

It's still a gift highlight for me, and it always will be. I'm not allowed to scuba dive anymore because Michelle put all the pieces together and went, oh, if you die, that would be bad.

[ 17 : 04 ] So I have a friend who's been, what's, you jump out of a plane without a parachute? Thank you. Skydiving? I just blanked right out. Friend has been skydiving, and he said, oh, you're insane to go scuba diving.

Like he said, how could you ever do it? It's so dangerous. And I said, dude, you're the one who jumped out of a plane with one chute. I said, if your chute fails, you're a pancake.

If my tank fails or any of my gear fails, sure, it hurts. I'll get to the surface, have the bends, and have to go to the hospital and decompression and all that.

But I said, I'm still alive. And he went, what's that? I was going to say, back up chute, back up schmack up. So two chutes fail, pancake.

There you go. Picked up with a sponge. So, I mean, that's the reality, right? And he said, yeah, fair enough. I guess so. So each of you likely have the memory of a special gift you received from someone, right?

[ 18 : 07 ] You can probably think of that in your mind. Something that made you feel seen, made you feel cared for, made you feel loved when you received it.

And we can also talk about love languages. People receive and give love in different ways. So hopefully it's not a surprise to you that this whole idea of giving and sharing with others is actually captured in the Bible.

You've probably heard this verse before at some point. It's become a fairly common saying even outside the church. We certainly hear one part in particular quite often. Let's hear the words of Acts 20, verse 35.

Do you know it?

It is more blessed to give than to receive. So I love this verse. I love the fact that it says, the Lord Jesus himself said, there's that intro, because it's as if to say that this isn't some other human being's good idea.

[ 19 : 19 ] This is God's idea. Jesus knows, the Father knows, knows that it's better to give than to receive. So share the good news.

It only makes sense that we would be overjoyed and excited about sharing about and giving the gift, the love of God to other people, telling them about it, teaching them how they can receive it themselves.

And I say that knowing that it doesn't always feel great, right? Oh, go share the gospel with someone. You begin to panic.

Palms begin to sweat. Some people are super great at it. Fearless, bold, clear, concise. Some people are terrified by it. You've heard me say this over the years.

Jerry Seinfeld has said, the fear of death is less for most people than the fear of public speaking. That means the person would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy.

[ 20 : 25 ] Anybody want to come up and finish the sermon? Go ahead. Go ahead. I can step aside. But that's the reality, right? It's terrifying in a lot of ways. It's vulnerable.

It's scary. It's a gift that we recognize that we may be more hesitant to talk about than makes any rational sense at all. But sharing about this gift can sometimes feel like just another thing that is weighing on our minds.

Just another thing on a list that is already overloaded and stacked with things, especially during the holidays. Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Oh, I've got to tell other people that Jesus loves them. Oh, boy. So how is that supposed to fit? How does it fit in between holiday parties or getting gifts for family and friends or menu planning or house decorating, everything else, decking the halls?

It's honestly a challenge of sorts. I know I'm not the only one who doesn't always feel great about it. It's not natural for everyone. would you like an alternative approach?

[ 21 : 37 ] That's not a rhetorical question. Yes, we would. What if we took some time this week, we've only got so many days left before Christmas, there's your palm sweating again, we cleared out some time and space with the specific intention of sharing love with someone else, a neighbor, a coworker, a family friend, or maybe even a contact on your phone.

We all, most of us, text people, email people, whatever, our phones are our lifeline. What if you looked at your phone and went, hey, there's someone I haven't talked to in a little while. It doesn't need to be something extravagant or massive.

Maybe it's just to show care or compassion for another person. Have you ever had someone reach out to you out of the blue in some unexpected way? Just to let you know that they've been thinking about you or praying for you.

That can really make your day, can't it? Sometimes it can make your whole week or more. If I had to guess, even a small gesture would feel amazing to the person on the receiving end.

because as we've considered a few times, it's a hectic season. We don't have time for self-care quite often. We're busy putting out rather than taking in.

[ 23 : 07 ] But maybe a little interruption of love and compassion would be worthy of celebrating, both for you as someone who's giving it and to the person who's on the receiving end.

I can almost guarantee that gift would be warmly received. A proper celebration. So when I say the word celebration, you can just think this in your head.

When I say the word celebration, what comes to mind? Is there a specific event or occasion that you immediately think about? Lots of us are thinking about getting together with family on Christmas Eve, on Christmas Day, on Boxing Day, on New Year's.

So those are things that they're a lot of work, but they generally bring a lot of joy. So as you're thinking about that, can you imagine the celebration that must have occurred when the people in and around Bethlehem came to realize that the Messiah had been born?

The kind of moment that I'm describing was actually captured in the Gospel of Luke. So let's look at Luke 2, verses 13 and 14. And you can flip there if you want or listen to me.

[ 24 : 19 ] Luke 2, verses 13 and 14. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

This is the scene that happens immediately after the angel proclaims to the shepherds in Luke 10. Remember last week we talked about good news that will bring great joy to all the people.

So the shepherds were sore afraid, were terrified, and then comes the good news and the great joy. So amazingly, in this account, a host of angels appears at the proclamation, and then a proper celebration of praise ensues.

angels. And I think, I don't know about you, but sometimes I do, I think we may gloss over the magnitude of the angelic audience here.

Lots of times, in referring to angels, they would use, Bible writers would use terminology that related to military groups.

[ 25 : 28 ] groups. So that people, audiences that were listening could listen to the fact that, oh, this would compare to a Roman legion or this would, you know, those kinds of things.

So they had a context. So have you ever wondered what a company of the heavenly host might have looked like? A couple angels, I don't know. The Greek word for host is *stratia*, and it was used to refer to the heavenly bodies.

So in other words, a host was compared to the stars in the sky. And the night sky, when Jesus was born, we can imagine it would have been clear as a bell.

So do the math with me. If we compare one host to the stars in the sky, that kind of volume and presence, how many could a multitude of hosts be?

Angels must have illuminated the expanse of the sky that night with the glory and the light of God's mind-boggling creation.

[ 26 : 40 ] What a picture for us today of how we can respond to the news of Jesus' birth. He's the fulfillment of hope and the prince of peace.

through him we can experience a peace in ourselves and with other people that transcends human understanding, frankly. He's also the cause for great joy, as we've just been reminded.

And then behind it all as we began this morning is the amazing, eternal, divine, redemptive love of God. of a God who would spare no cost, even giving his only son to pay the price of reconciliation with his dearly loved creation.

celebration. This, friends, is the good news and it's worthy of a proper celebration. As you make your final preparations for Christmas, I want to encourage you to receive the gift of Christmas with joy and gratitude.

If possible, share the gift as we've talked about. Share this gift of love and forgiveness with people in your life, with your neighbors or coworkers or family members or friends.

[ 28 : 07 ] Remember, people that you love that you thought about. It is truly better to give than to receive. And I want you to experience this year how amazing it feels to give the gospel away.

And then finally, to prepare your heart for a proper celebration, the kind which this good news, this event, this Christ deserves.

Christmas is a time to celebrate. It's a time to worship, to praise God, to thank him for all that he has done and will continue to do in our lives.

So, I hope to see you at the Christmas Eve service. And I, as I've been speaking, I've made notes of everyone who's here. You better be there. Be good for goodness sake.

But if I won't see you again now until the new year, until we're back from our vacation, may God grant you a blessed and joyful Christmas. as you spend time with your loved ones and you reflect on the greatest gift of all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 23 ] Amen.