*DEVOTIONAL*

December 10 - 15

*Love*

**Monday, December 10 Luke 1:39-45**

*“Elizabeth’s child leaped within her”*

What mother has not waited for the first stirrings of a child or felt the goodness of God’s blessing in the fullness of her womb? The joy of Mary and Elizabeth is the joy of all who look forward with wonder and thankfulness to the birth of a child. The joining of this wonder with God’s saving work invites us to consider how the experience of expectancy teaches us the ways of God’s gracious work in human experience. Joy is peaked by waiting. Love is made known in tenderness and promise. Every birth, therefore, can be a sign of salvation, of finding favor, of being blessed, of living with promise, and of realizing its fulfillment.

Joy is a recurring theme throughout Luke. The joy of the annunciations and the births in the first two chapters is repeated in the joy of forgiveness, healing, and lifting up the outcast found throughout the ministry of Jesus. Appropriately, at the end of the Gospel, the disciples return to Jerusalem with joy and are in the Temple praising God. God’s saving work brings joy to expression in human experience, and that joy is most fully expressed in the praise of God.

*I praise you, Father, for in your Son you brought love into the world. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 11 Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

*“You must love the Lord your God”*

The command to love God is a central aspect of Scripture, shaping much of Jewish and Christian spiritual living. In Deuteronomy, this demand for a loving attitude toward God is closely related to the concept of moral obedience. It reflects an attitude of giving priority to the demands of God, and it is closely connected with the exceptional love that God has shown for his people. Because of God’s great love for us, we are to live a strong reciprocal life of affection and commitment to our God.

The command to love God presents us with a certain amount of concern, since it is a far from straightforward undertaking to show love toward a power that can at any moment take away everything that one possesses, including one’s life. Yet, the strong emphasis placed in the Bible on all the gifts and benefits God has showered on us moves us to trust the love of God. In fact, he becomes the supreme expression of love, motivating, inspiring, and making possible a deeper understanding of the nature of love in the lives of his children.

*I love you, Lord, with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 12 Leviticus 19:11-18**

*“Love your neighbor as yourself”*

These verses address damaging behaviors and the underlying attitudes toward other people that cause or prevent them. For example, verse 16 speaks against spreading slander and profiting by it. The link between these is all too common. By starting malicious rumors, it is possible to hurt or even destroy a person and in the process gain advantage, whether simply to improve the relative status of one’s image at the expense of someone else or even to remove the victim in order to take something that belongs to him or her.

The proper outlet for a grievance against a “brother” (i.e., a fellow child of God) is not hatred but communication. Here is a simple, effective, and practical approach to feelings of anger toward others with which we are routinely tempted. Don’t bottle them up and let them fester. Rather, communicate the cause of frustration so that the problem can be resolved in a positive manner. In this way, rather than ending up hating your neighbor, you become able to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

*Help me to be truthful with my neighbor, Lord, so I will love and not hate. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

December 10 - 15

*Love*

**Thursday, December 13 Luke 1:46-56**

*“I rejoice in God my Savior”*

Mary praises God as Savior. The confession “Savior” expresses the desperate need of people for God to save them, for we do not have the power to save ourselves. To name God as “Savior” also means that we should never limit this title to God the Son, as though it does not apply to God the Father and God the Spirit. All that Jesus does in the Gospel of Luke to bring about salvation - calling for repentance, forgiving sinners, healing the sick, casting out demons, eating with outcasts, and dying a death that saves us from our sin – he does according to God’s purpose and intent. In Jesus, the role of God as Savior is made clear.

To confess that God is our Savior means that we will not look to some other power for salvation from the chaos we have created. Neither technology nor social progress, neither education nor legislated reforms will deliver us in and of themselves from meaningless lives. God may use any of these processes, but the basis of our trust, hope, and commitment should be clear: God is our Savior.

*You are my Savior, Lord God, and there is none other. Amen.*

**Friday, December 14 John 15:9-17**

*“Love each other”*

The union between Jesus and his disciples is not an external arrangement, but an internal, personal relationship. Jesus defines this union, gives it content and substance, by a “triangle” of love. The Son loves these disciples as the Father loves him and the disciples. This is the love that has sought them out, called them into life, and which now holds them and sends them out into the world to continue his mission. These disciples are then to love one another as Jesus loves them. This is not an option but a command, a command impossible to obey unless they live in his love.

Jesus now calls his disciples “friends” to distinguish them from servants, who do not know the deeper thoughts of their masters. What characterizes such friends is that they obey him. In the Old Testament both Abraham and Moses are called friends of God. This title is unusual in the Bible and speaks of the highest relationship possible between God and a human being. This friendship is not our doing; rather, Jesus chooses us as friends, which give us tremendous security that his affection for us will not disappear.

*You call me “friend,” Lord, and you continue to reveal your love for me. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 15 John 13:31-35**

*“As I have loved you, you should love one another”*

In the Gospel of John, the Father gives commands to Jesus the Son and Jesus gives commands to his followers. For Jesus, this is not a suggestion any more than the Father’s words to him were suggestions. This command to love bears all the weight of the person who speaks it. The problem with Jesus’ command is that it seems impossible to order someone to love. While we can try to love others by an act of our will, we are more than likely going to fail because our human will is profoundly self-centered.

Love must come from the heart if it is to be genuine; it cannot be faked, not even with the best of intentions. And, the only way that love can grow in our hearts is if our hearts have been nurtured by the love of another. This is why Jesus stresses his love for his disciples. Not so much telling them that the way they are to love must be exactly the way he has loved, but that because he has loved them with a love that has stirred their hearts, they are now able to love one another. When they do so, they are showing themselves faithful followers of Jesus, the One who loves.

*Your love for me, Lord, enables me to love others. Amen.*