

“Ever Shining Love Light”

Jeremiah 31:3-6, Zephaniah 3:17, Isaiah 9:6, 58:10 54:10, Lamentations 3:22-23, Psalm 36:7, Psalm 136:2-3, Luke 2:10, John 1:10 & 1 John 4:16

Pastor James York

December 24, 2024

God is love. God creates. God knows your name. Love creates. Love knows your name. God created a good cosmos, a loving gift to us, to show us that we are loved, we belong, we are cherished by God. All of creation reveals God's love for all people. The trees clapping their hands. Stars winking at you as they twinkle. Living water all around us, water part of us, water in the air, water to play with, water to drink. God's love flows with water. God's love fills you with every breath. God colors portraits for you expressing God's love with sunrises and sunsets. God is constantly saying, “I love you” through everything and everyone.

Long ago our ancestors rebelled and rejected God's love, yet God kept reaching out in love. God tried all sorts of miracles, but God's love was rejected over and over again and the darkness of the world grew.

God sent prophets to proclaim God's love. The Message paraphrases Jeremiah: **Jeremiah 31:3-6 MSG Select Phrases “God told them, “I have never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love! I will build you up again. You will resume your singing, grabbing tambourines and joining the dance.”** The prophet Zephaniah proclaims: **Zephaniah 3:17 “The Lord your God is with you, God is mighty to save. God will take great delight in you, God will comfort you with God's love, God will rejoice over you with singing.”** Isaiah proclaims: **Isaiah 54:10 “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,”** says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” Lamentations declares: **Lamentations 3:22-23 “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is God's faithfulness.”** The prophet Jeremiah proclaims God's words to you. **Jeremiah 31:3 “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”** The psalmist sings: **Psalm 36:7 “How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.”** **Psalm 136:2-3 “God's steadfast love endures forever.”**

God continually proclaims in multiple ways that you are loved, that all people are loved, and will be loved by God forever. And we struggle to perceive love. The world goes through dark seasons. Each person goes through dark seasons. God is light. God is love. The love light shines in the darkness. The darkness will never overcome the love light.

God aches when we do not perceive God's love. God weeps when we hurt ourselves, hurt each other and hurt creation. God is loving to heal every hurt. God weeps when we create systems, governments, and economies that fail to love everyone. God weeps when we create religions that falsely claim that some people are not loved. So, God came up with another way to show God's love for everyone.

God chose to take on human flesh. God chose common parents. God chose to be born poor, to lay in a feed trough. God chose to announce his birth to lowly, ragtag, shepherds. The birth announcement was simple: **Luke 2:10 “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”** God told Joseph, do not be afraid, give God in human flesh a common name, Jesus. Jesus will save people. God chose to work as a common carpenter. God took on human flesh and moves into our neighborhood to experience everything we experience, to feel every one of our hurts, to shed every one of our tears, to experience all that we experience. God took on human flesh and moves into our neighborhood to clean up our mess, to disperse our darkness, to show that God knows your name, to prove that you are loved and will be loved for eternity. Your identity will always be a beloved child of God. You will always belong to God's family.

James Somerville said: “I can imagine God putting the incarnation together like a parent bolting a bicycle together on Christmas Eve, anticipating the look of delight in their child's eyes.”

The gospel of John explains: **John 1:10 NLT “God came into the very world God created, but the world did not recognize Jesus.”** Why do many people not recognize the love of God? Because they are looking for love in grand, supernatural experiences. And God is in all of that for sure. And God is in the common, the ordinary. Any instance of peace, joy, love is God loving you. Leonard Sweet said, “God whispers to us in every candle and carol, every card and creche: ‘I love you, I love you.’”

God in human flesh has many grand, powerful, supernatural names. The prophet Isaiah declares: **Isaiah 9:6 NLT “For a child is born to us, a child is given to us. The government will rest on their shoulders. And they will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Parent, Prince of Peace.”** God in human flesh chose to most often go by a common name, Jesus, to reveal that God's love is for everyone, that Jesus is our friend.

I experience God's love through heaping bowls of butter covered popcorn and trees. Lisle Gwynn Garrity explains God's love for her feels like a warm blanket wrapped around her. God's love feels like steady ground, a path, for her feet to find as she steps forward into the unknown of a new year. God's love feels like a soft whisper in her ears, saying her name and reminding her she will always be loved. God's love is like a good friend.

Scripture proclaims: **1 John 4:16 NRSV** “**So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**” All the ways that you experience love, that is God loving you. All the ways that you love, that is God loving you.

Jesus' birth makes the vastness of God personal. The God who made the seas and the stars is also the God who made you, good, distinctive and spectacular. The God of creation takes on flesh, which means you are fully known and fully loved. God knows your name and everything about you and God loves you completely.

God disperses darkness. God chose to be born—to a teenage Galilean girl in a precarious marital situation, vulnerable to oppressive Roman powers. God chose to be born in a place troubled with conflict, in a harsh economy, in a divided land. God chose to be born to know every human vulnerability and emotion. God chose to be born to save us, to disperse our darkness, to disperse the world's darkness. God is light. God first created light. God continually fills the world with light. God declares that you are light. The love light will never be extinguished. The love light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome the light.

I hope you are in a wonderful bright season. Perhaps you are in an awful dark season. God knows what you are going through. God is loving you. All may seem dark. And God's light is with you. God's light will disperse your darkness and the darkness of the world.

The prophet Isaiah explains that you may feel like a smoldering wick. There may be no visible light in your wick, no heat, no life. God revives the light of every smoldering wick. God makes us into a light, that shines for eternity. If tonight you feel like a smoldering wick, then know this, God will nurture you back into a brilliant light. If the world seems dark to you and you fear more darkness is coming, then know this, God is the light shining in the darkness. The darkness will never overcome the light. The prophet Isaiah declares: **Isaiah 58:10** “**You light shall dawn in the darkness and your darkness shall be as the noonday.**”

God's love is a thread weaving through the fabric of time. God's love is a deeply personal reality tailored to each of us. As our faces warm against the gentle glow of candles, our hearts are illuminated by Christmas, God made flesh, hope coming down and calling us by name. The infinite God who orchestrated the cosmos, who set each star in the sky, is the same God who crafted the uniqueness of each of us, from the swirls of our fingerprints to the dreams nestled within our souls.

Often overlooked and undervalued, shepherds were the first to hear the news of Jesus' birth. The angels' announcement, “To you, a savior is born,” was profoundly personal, a divine message weaving those who are often unseen into the grand tapestry of God's cosmic plan of redemption and renewal. God gave this declaration first to workers who had dirt under their fingernails, not gilded rings on their fingers, which shows us the accessibility of Jesus' birth to all people, regardless of status or background. No matter how small or insignificant we may feel (or have been made to feel), we are intimately known and dearly loved by God, each of us a unique patch in the quilt of humanity. Our individuality is not lost in the vastness of creation but is cherished and celebrated by God who calls us by name. You are invited to savor the light, your cherished place in God's loving heart. In Jesus, love has a name. As candles flicker and carols are sung, rejoice for Love, God, Light, knows your name.

Kayla Craig prays a blessing for you: “God knows you completely and loves you fully. Rest assured that you are not a mere face in the crowd but a beloved child of God, known and called by name. In light of this glorious truth, may you be a bearer of peace and harbinger of love today and forevermore.”

"Hey Love" a poem by Sarah Speed: My grandmother was strong. That is what they tell me. She played piano and clipped coupons. She raised four kids. One was sick. One never would, never could grow up. But she loved them all. And when life fell apart in brand new ways, she bought books. She went back to school. She started over again. She was the kind of strong that reminds you of a live oak. The kind of woman, the kind of tree, you would want to crawl up into and whisper, “Tell me how you did it. Tell me how you survived the storm.” She was fifty-one when a vessel in her brain burst, blood coloring outside the lines, blood stealing large swathes of her strength with every pulse. After that, she never did play piano, read, or clip coupons. After that, she never could find the words. Nouns became things to point out. Names became numbers. Conversation creaked and slowed, but one word stayed. The name of my baptism never crossed her lips, but when my grandmother saw me, she would say—Heeeeeey Love. My grandmother and God have this in common. Both know my name. Both call me Love.

Amen