

Holidays and Holy Days

Week 2: Advent 3

Celebrating Christmas; Longing for Love

- **Opening Song:** Offering (Christmas Version)
- **Light Third Candle** – Shepherds
 - **Advent Candle Notes:** Pink Candle (borrowed from Lent, show mercy of God/ glimpse of hope to come even in midst of suffer / repent focus)
 - **Passage:** Luke 2:8-20
 - **Song:** Good Christian Men Rejoice
 - **Prayer**
- **Celebrating Christ’s Birth**
 - **History of Christmas** (*see history on next 2 pages*)
 - **Debates on how to celebrate / if to celebrate**
 - **Discussion:** should we celebrate Christmas as a church / families? Should we give gifts? What about Santa?
 - **Keep Christ in Christmas**
 - **Discussion:** what do you do personally / as a family during Advent / Christmas to keep focus on Christ
 - **Examples:** Christmas retreat, Advent wreath and sing at dinner, special advent celebrations with friends...
 - **Advent: Waiting, Longing**
 - **Define “Longing”**
 - strong, persistent desire or craving, esp. for something unattainable or distant
 - having or characterized by persistent or earnest desire
 - (from Dictionary.com)
 - **Examples:** Zechariah (Luke 1), Simeon / Anna (Luke 2:22-40), ...
- **Longing for Love** (*See talk “Longing for Love” starting on page 4*)
- **Closing**
 - **Prayer**
 - **Next Week:** Longing for Peace and for Christ

History of Christmas (from the History Channels History.com)

The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of the man called Jesus, **early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter**. Many peoples rejoiced during the winter solstice, when the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.

In **Scandinavia**, the Norse celebrated **Yule from December 21, the winter solstice, through January**. In recognition of the return of the **sun**, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the coming year.

The end of December was a perfect time for celebration in most areas of Europe. **At that time of year, most cattle were slaughtered so they would not have to be fed during the winter**. For many, it was the only time of year when they had a supply of fresh meat. In addition, most wine and beer made during the year was finally fermented and ready for drinking.

In **Germany**, people honored the **pagan god Oden** during the mid-winter holiday. Germans were terrified of Oden, as they believed he made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people, and then decide who would prosper or perish. Because of his presence, many people chose to stay inside.

In **Rome**, where winters were not as harsh as those in the far north, Saturnalia—a holiday in honor of **Saturn, the god of agriculture**—was celebrated. Beginning in the week leading up to the winter solstice and continuing for a full month, Saturnalia was a hedonistic time, when food and drink were plentiful and the normal Roman social order was turned upside down. For a month, slaves would become masters. Peasants were in command of the city. Business and schools were closed so that everyone could join in the fun.

Also around the time of the **winter solstice, Romans observed Juvenalia**, a feast honoring the **children of Rome**. In addition, members of the upper classes often celebrated **the birthday of Mithra, the god of the unconquerable sun**, on December 25. It was believed that Mithra, an infant god, was born of a rock. For some Romans, Mithra's birthday was the most sacred day of the year.

In the **early years of Christianity**, **Easter** was the main holiday; the birth of Jesus was not celebrated. In the **fourth century**, church officials decided to institute the birth of Jesus as a holiday. Unfortunately, the **Bible** does not mention date for his birth (a fact Puritans later pointed out in order to deny the legitimacy of the celebration). Although some evidence suggests that his **birth may have occurred in the spring** (why would shepherds be herding in the middle of winter?), **Pope Julius I chose December 25**. It is commonly believed that the church chose this date in an effort to **adopt and absorb the traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival**. First called the **Feast of the Nativity**, the custom spread to Egypt by 432 and to England by the end of the sixth century. By the end of the eighth century, the celebration of Christmas had spread all the way to Scandinavia. **Today, in the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated 13 days after the 25th, which is also referred to as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day**. This is the day it is believed that the three wise men finally found Jesus in the manger.

By holding Christmas at the same time as traditional **winter solstice festivals**, church leaders increased the chances that **Christmas would be popularly embraced**, but **gave up the ability to dictate how it was celebrated**. By the **Middle Ages**, Christianity had, for the most part, replaced pagan religion. On Christmas, **believers attended church, then celebrated raucously in a drunken, carnival-like atmosphere similar to today's Mardi Gras**. Each year, a beggar or student would be crowned the "lord of misrule" and eager celebrants played the part of his subjects. The poor would go to the houses of the rich and demand their best food and drink. If owners failed to comply, their visitors would most likely terrorize them with mischief. Christmas became the time of year when the **upper classes could repay their real or imagined "debt" to society by entertaining less fortunate citizens**.

In the early 17th century, a wave of religious reform changed the way Christmas was celebrated in Europe. When [Oliver Cromwell](#) and his [Puritan](#) forces took over England in 1645, they vowed to rid England of decadence and, as part of their effort, cancelled Christmas. By popular demand, [Charles II](#) was restored to the throne and, with him, came the return of the popular holiday.

The [pilgrims](#), English separatists that came to America in 1620, were even more orthodox in their Puritan beliefs than Cromwell. As a result, Christmas was not a holiday in early America. From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was actually outlawed in Boston. Anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit was fined five shillings. By contrast, in the [Jamestown](#) settlement, [Captain John Smith](#) reported that Christmas was enjoyed by all and passed without incident.

After the [American Revolution](#), English customs fell out of favor, including Christmas. In fact, Congress was in session on December 25, 1789, the first Christmas under America's new constitution. Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870.

It wasn't until the 19th century that Americans began to embrace Christmas. Americans re-invented Christmas, and changed it from a raucous carnival holiday into a family-centered day of peace and nostalgia. But what about the 1800s peaked American interest in the holiday?

The early 19th century was a period of class conflict and turmoil. During this time, unemployment was high and gang rioting by the disenchanting classes often occurred during the Christmas season. In 1828, the New York city council instituted the city's first police force in response to a Christmas riot. This catalyzed certain members of the upper classes to begin to change the way Christmas was celebrated in America.

In 1819, best-selling author [Washington Irving](#) wrote *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, gent.*, a series of stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. The sketches feature a squire who invited the peasants into his home for the holiday. In contrast to the problems faced in American society, the two groups mingled effortlessly. In Irving's mind, Christmas should be a peaceful, warm-hearted holiday bringing groups together across lines of wealth or social status. Irving's fictitious celebrants enjoyed "ancient customs," including the crowning of a Lord of Misrule. Irving's book, however, was not based on any holiday celebration he had attended – in fact, many historians say that Irving's account actually "invented" tradition by implying that it described the true customs of the season.

Also around this time, English author [Charles Dickens](#) created the classic holiday tale, *A Christmas Carol*. The story's message—the importance of charity and good will towards all humankind—struck a powerful chord in the United States and England and showed members of Victorian society the benefits of celebrating the holiday.

The family was also becoming less disciplined and more sensitive to the emotional needs of children during the early 1800s. Christmas provided families with a day when they could lavish attention-and gifts-on their children without appearing to "spoil" them.

As Americans began to embrace Christmas as a perfect family holiday, old customs were unearthed. People looked toward recent immigrants and Catholic and Episcopalian churches to see how the day should be celebrated. In the next 100 years, Americans built a Christmas tradition all their own that included pieces of many other customs, including decorating trees, sending holiday cards, and gift-giving.

Although most families quickly bought into the idea that they were celebrating Christmas how it had been done for centuries, Americans had really re-invented a holiday to fill the cultural needs of a growing nation.

Longing for Love

TEACHING NOTES

What is Love?

Beatles: "All We Need is Love"

Discussion: What is Love? What does it look like? What emotions does it stir?

Teenager 'love' ; 1st kiss ... love of sport, food, dog, cat ... lifelong love ...

Love is any of a number of [emotions](#) related to a sense of strong [affection](#)^[1] and [attachment](#). The word *love* can refer to a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes, ranging from generic [pleasure](#) ("I loved that meal") to intense [interpersonal attraction](#) ("I love my husband"). This diversity of uses and meanings, combined with the complexity of the feelings involved, makes love unusually difficult to consistently define, even compared to other emotional states. – Wikipedia

"One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: That word is love." – Sophocles

"Love is the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired." - Mark Twain

I Cor 13 – Love is patient, kind, ...

Longing for Love

Discussion: Why do we long for Love?

Desire to be cared for, appreciated, respected, felt significant ...

Created for Love

Gen. 1: 27 - Created in the image of a relational God

Gen. 1:27 - created "male and female"

Gen. 2:13

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Song of Songs 4 (1-3; 9-12)

¹ How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Mount Gilead.

² Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,
coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin;
not one of them is alone.

³ Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

⁹ You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;
you have stolen my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.

¹⁰ How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much more pleasing is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!

¹¹ Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride;
milk and honey are under your tongue.
The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon.

¹² You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride;
you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

**There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world
than for bread.**

~ Mother Teresa

Love stirs the very deepest emotions in us

- First True Love – Build relationship, then ask her to court
- Walking in the park, looking into her eyes, telling her what she means to me
- San Antonio, sitting in a restaurant on river walk, talk about life
- Emotions run wild ... deep love, joy like never felt before

Failure of Love

Yet Love does not always work out ...

Most heartbreaking night of life – she ask to not see each other for a time, then end

- speechless, just sat there totally devastated, not even able to speak - Broken Heart of not being loved / Breaking up / Separation / Divorce

Even true, lasting love is corrupted by sin

We sin against each other ... sometimes in incredibly hurtful ways
Sin also corrupts world we live in in ways we feel in relationships – including death

And many do not find love

Facebook: most heartbreaking posts so often deal with failure of love, backstabbing or failure of relationships, or lack of any true friends

Loneliness:

affected with, characterized by, or causing a depressing feeling of being alone; lonesome.
destitute of sympathetic or friendly companionship, intercourse, support, etc.
lone; solitary; without company; companionless.

Dealing with our Longing for Love

Discussion: What do we do when we are lonely? Where do people look for love?

Looking for Love in all the wrong places

I was looking for love in all the wrong places
Looking for love in too many faces
Searching your eyes, looking for traces
Of what.. I'm dreaming of...
Hopin' to find a friend and a lover
God bless the day I discover
Another heart, lookin' for love

“If our hungers are not fed from the banquet, we will inevitably eat out of the dumpster.”

- Hugh Hefner who began playboy because not hugged as a child, wanted to break from “puritan heritage”

Why Bible so filled with instructions about sexual impurity? God knows we long for love so deeply we will do anything to fill that need!

Remember feelings of first dance / first kiss in High School ... stirred things deep within ... realized they should only be stirred in one I will marry! In any other grow desires that can not be fulfilled, and leave permanent emotional scars when relationship ends

Very glad that God protected us from that in my later courship, and that those are still good memories to this day, even though that relationship did end

People of God through time give in to sexual urges, and turn against God ... Marry those that worship other Gods and end up worshipping those idols as well!

The people's lack of love for God even pictured in terms of adultery

Why leave us unfulfilled?

Discussion: Is God cruel to give 'unfulfilled' desires?

"The greater your longing for love, the greater is your capacity to receive the love from God." (from Passion and Purity by Elizabeth Elliot)

While God made us for relationships, and even created women for man so he would not have to be alone, God never intended for any relationship on earth to fully satisfy ... Only God himself can fully satisfy our longing for love.

Book of Psalms: 2 repeated themes of love

“the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases”

“I love the law of the Lord”, it is honey, it is gold, it is life ... it alone fully satisfies

Do you believe that? Do you truly believe, deep within, that God can satisfy, that his steadfast love for you is even greater than any persons love ever can be

God is Love ... and Love YOU

I John 4: God is Love

Ephesians 5

Marriage is a picture of Christ's love for us ...

Also comments on us being sons, not slaves or servants ... cry out Abba, Father

Exodus 34:5-7

⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

I John 3:1-2

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Christmas: Ultimate proof God Loves You!

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,^f that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Christmas is about Love Incarnate

And Christmas **sets us up for Good Friday and Easter**, where we see the greatest love

I John 4:9-10

⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son^a into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for^b our sins.

I John 3:16

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Romans 5:6-8

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's Love Guaranteed to Last

Ex: Me after breakup with Jenny: Les Miserable

Main characters – lost love, struggles of life ... also struggle of far worse off

Finale ... picture of heaven (see last page for words)

All earthly love, even the best, will fail you, and will at least pass away one day

But the **love of God endures forever**, it is eternal ... And it is guaranteed to those that know and love Christ

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^c

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Application: Are You Longing for God's Love? (

it's funny. When you fall in love or have a big crush on somebody, it's like you can't think of anything else. Your whole world—everything you think and feel—revolves around that person. And sometimes it's that feeling we want more than anything else. But if you think about it, that's how it felt when you first met Jesus. He became the love of your soul! (found on the internet)

if it doesn't break your heart, it isn't love; if it doesn't break your heart, it's not enough.
- Krissy facebook post

Rev 2

– church in Ephesus – good deeds, but forsaken 1st love

we all long for love, but does that longing drive us back to God, back to Christ in the manger and on the cross and seated at the right hand of God, back to the spirit who guarantees our inheritance, back to longing for God and his love more than anything else in life...

Les Miserable Finale: (heaven)

FANTINE:

come with me
where chains will never bind you
all your grief
at last, at last behind you
lord in heaven;
look down on him in mercy

VALJEAN:

forgive me all my trespasses and take me to your glory

FANTINE, VALJEAN AND EPONINE:

take my hand
and lead me to salvation
take my love
for love is everlasting
and remember
the truth that once was spoken:
to love another person is to see the face of god

ALL:

do you hear the people sing?
lost in the valley of the night
it is the music of a people who are climbing to the light
for the wretched of the earth
there is a flame that never dies
even the darkest nights will end and the sun will rise

they will live again in freedom in the garden of the lord
they will walk behind the bloodshed
they will put away the sword
the chain will be broken and all men will have their reward!

will you join in our crusade?
who will be strong and stand with me?
somewhere beyond the barricade is there a world you long to see?
do you hear the people sing?
say, do you hear the distant drums?
it is the future that they bring when tomorrow comes!

REPEAT

Aaaaah, aaaaah, aaaah,
tomorrow comes!!