

# **Christmas Eve, 24 December 2016**

**Isaiah 9:2-7**

**Titus 2:11-**

**Luke 2:1-20**

## **THE ORIGINAL LOVE STORY Adapted from a Sermon for Christmas Eve - by Bill Adams-**

One of the greatest theologians that ever lived, Karl Barth, was asked to be a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of a captivating closing lecture, the president of the university turned to the renowned theologian and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

It was the perfect question for a man who had written literally tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put into print. The students held pencils right up against their writing pads, ready to take down the sublime insight of the greatest theologian of their time, word by word.

Karl Barth closed his tired eyes, and he thought for a minute, and then he half smiled, opened his eyes, and said to those young seminarians, "The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

So I think it is fair to say that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever written.

I wish with all my heart that everybody could read it that way, but we all meet people every day for whom the Gospels read more like a legal contract. Somehow in the midst of all those beautiful love verses, they hear only clauses and conditions and the spelling out of all the consequences should any of those clauses and conditions ever be broken. And then they haven't even started on the fine print, yet.

So, I thank God that Christmas comes around once a year to remind us that God isn't in the business of balancing books and settling accounts, nor is God concerned about our status or position in life. If God were concerned about any of those things, then I am sure that Jesus would never have been born into such disagreeable circumstances as we find in the second chapter of Luke this evening.

No. Christmas is the beginning of a classic love story with all the right ingredients: infatuation, pursuit, risk and relationship.

But in all relationships of love, there does have to be that first meeting, isn't it?

When I was a child, I remember asking "what if I had been born to other parents? I would never have known the love of the parents I had, and still love."

If I haven't made certain choices, I wouldn't have known the people I have loved, and still love.

So, what if I've made different choices? Lived in another town, worked somewhere else? I still occasionally find myself asking those curious "what if" questions. Do you ever find yourself asking those kinds of questions?

If we've made different choices, we here, our lives might have never crossed paths.

So, it seems that Christmas is a crossing of paths; Christmas is where we find Christ intersecting with humanity. Christmas is our first and best meeting with the God who has desired us from the very beginning.

I'm convinced that if it weren't for Christmas we might never have known the intensity of the love that God has for us.

Mary and Joseph, far from home because of imperial rule, a peasant mother giving birth in an unsanitary stable. There was no fanfare, no royal delegation.

They just laid him in that manger and they watched his little face, and they listened for his breathing, just like every new parent does.

No; this couldn't be anything but true love.

True love accepts the beloved for who they really are; God chooses to love us precisely because we are subject to the human condition, not because of a favourable bottom line on a social and moral profit and loss statement. Mary and Joseph had nothing to commend them other than their humanity.

God had waited ever so patiently for One to be born into our world who was willing to finally embody this love that God has for us; not some of the time, not when it was convenient, but in every waking, breathing minute of every single day. It is the birth of that love into our world that we celebrate tonight!

Who would ever have guessed that this crossing of paths, this intersection of the divine and the human, would take place so long ago in a remote, speck of dust village called Bethlehem of Judea?

Who would have guessed that in that time and place One would be born into our world who would one day fill his life so much with the experience of God, so much with the love of God, that in him thousands upon thousands would be moved to make the incredible claim that they had actually met their God in person.

This is the night when God sent out a love letter of cosmic proportions.

This is the night in the little town of Bethlehem when God and humanity were joined as a bride and groom on their wedding day.

And as Jesus grew and went out into the world, so our understanding of just how much God loves us also grew. We find in Jesus that God's love doesn't demand perfection, that forgiveness isn't given away sparingly, but recklessly and indiscriminately, that unconditional really means unconditional, and that God's love is completely and thoroughly inclusive.

We find that even the likes of us gathered here tonight fall within the embrace of that love, and that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was consumed by two world wars, the Vietnam war, our own so called border war and other conflicts that are still going on, all of them ostensibly to maintain the pace or to create peace, so is it any wonder that we find ourselves talking a lot about peace? However, peace does not begin on the battlefield, peace begins in our individual hearts.

Peace begins with the knowledge that God loves and accepts us just as we are. It begins with Christmas!

The infant Jesus is our living, breathing sign of the immeasurable love that God has had for all of us from the very beginning.

Christmas is the living promise that we are never ever alone. No matter where we are in life, no matter in what condition we find ourselves, no matter how far we might stray away, or how unfaithful we are, God, the supreme lover, will pursue us in love for eternity!

It's a love that never stops shining.

May God bless each of you and those you love this Christmas night!

**Amen**