

The Gift of Love©
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1 John 4:7-21; Luke 2:10-20

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Remember the story of the little girl who was afraid of thunderstorms? Maddie was asleep in her bed in the night when there was a bright, frightening flash of lighting and a loud clap of thunder that shook the house and woke her up.

She was terrified and started crying loudly, calling for her mama and daddy to come to her. Her parents had been working on getting her to stay in her own bed all night, as four year old Maddie had a habit of coming into their room sometime in the night.

Her mother got up and went to her. She sat on the edge of her little girl's bed, soothing her and trying to get her to go back to sleep. Her daughter asked if she could just go get in bed with her parents for a little while, til the storm was gone. But her mom told her she didn't need to be afraid. "Remember, God is right here with you. Always." She said.

Maddie quietly thought this over for a minute and then she replied. "I know God is always with me. But sometimes I just need someone with skin on."

The whole world needed someone with skin on. And God knew it. And John writes in his good news story that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life.

The angel went to the young girl, Mary, and said: "*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.* ³¹ *You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.* ³² *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.* Fear not.

Last week, as we focused on the Advent theme of HOPE, we heard from Matthew that the angel went to Joseph and said to him: *Fear not; do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child she has conceived is from the Holy Spirit.* He said this child will be named *Jesus* – *meaning one who saves.*

But then he said that the child will also be called *Emmanuel* – which means *God is with us.*

It was out of the purest, deepest, most perfect love that God gave us the gift of himself – God with skin on.

God came to us as a human in the form of his son, Jesus – *Emmanuel.* He could have come in full, majestic glory, knocking our socks off with his divine light and his full-on power. But that would have scared us humans so much we might have had a heart attack before we ever knew it was God Almighty.

So, God, in his great wisdom and deep love, came to earth in the most vulnerable, innocent, meekest way possible – in the same exact way we all come into the world. As a tiny human baby. All of us with skin on. There's no way we could be afraid of a baby. Fear not.

Just like Maddie was afraid of thunderstorms, the world was full of fear. But the angels constantly gave the good news and started it with these words:

Fear not, the King James Version says. *Do not be afraid*, the other translations say.

'Do not be afraid, They proclaimed to the shepherds, For see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

John writes, in his first letter, that God is love. And he says: ¹⁸*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.*

In our Advent study book *Christmas Gifts that Won't Break*, the author talks about the Peanuts Christmas video where Linus, who always carries his security blanket with him, as he sucks his thumb, recites the Christmas story. He says the words of the angels to the shepherds in the King James Version: [Listen to what he says and see what he does.](#) (*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*)

As Linus says those words from holy Scripture, he drops his security blanket and his hands are freely moving in expression as he talks. It's like the Scripture transforms Linus and he doesn't need that blanket anymore. And then, what we don't see on this video, is that he ends up wrapping his blanket – the blanket he always carries – around the base of the pathetic little Charlie Brown Christmas tree.

¹⁸*There is no fear in love, John writes, but perfect love casts out fear; ... We love because he first loved us.*

What are you afraid of? What are the storms in your life that shake you right where you live? That rattle the windows of your world and cause you to cry out in fear?

Is it financial? Do you watch as the stock market goes on a roller coaster ride? Climbing, climbing up, up and then suddenly takes a deep, fast plunge to the bottom?

This week, Sherry and I were in touch with a young family about to be evicted from their home due to the loss of a job, and another who had been living without heat because of financial struggles. Real life fears.

Maybe it's a health scare, or the loss of someone you love and you fear the dark, lonely feeling of grief.

Our Creative Spirits Team wrote these words: *This second week of Advent celebrates the gift of abounding, endless love through Jesus. This gift of love reaches down to us, driving away fear as we are invited into relationship with God. And we reflect it, in the love we share with our families, our friends, our partners, and even strangers and the world around us. We love and are beloved through Christ, and that is a gift that never breaks.*

The gift of *Emmanuel – God with us* – God with skin on – is a gift of pure, perfect love. And *love never fails*. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Fear not! You are loved. Love – A Christmas gift that never breaks.

With this gift of love comes others who represent the love of Christ for us. More God-with-skin-on-love surrounding us. Our Creative Spirits team presents a video showing how that love has come to us in many ways.

We conclude with the video that portrays the different types of love the Scriptures shows us and the words the New Testament uses for love.

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