

Advent Midweek 1 – 2023
The Incarnation and the Fruit of the Spirit
Love, Joy, and Peace
1 John 4:1-21
John 14:21-31

Have you ever hungered? Has your body ever announced its need? It is difficult to ignore. It grows. Slowly at first and then, as more time passes, it becomes more insistent, more urgent. The body is attempting to help itself, to accomplish what must be accomplished for it to remain healthy, remain effective. Imagine if one did not have this trigger?

Have you ever felt an emotional, a spiritual hunger? The lonely ache for companionship, for love, for connection. Does the soul cry out for what it needs like the body cries out for food and water? The outcast yearns for inclusion. The soiled yearns for cleansing. The diseased yearns for health. Does sinful man yearn for holy God? We are finite. We are weak. We are selfish. Has your soul ever longed for more than what is inside your vapid heart?

Mary was incredulous. How can this be? Gabriel provided insight. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit would give her the gift of gifts. The fruit of her womb would be God’s Son with God’s character and God’s power and God’s life and God’s love. Mary’s bewilderment morphed into exaltation, euphoria, pure and unadulterated joy. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant” (Luke 1:46-48). God has looked upon the humble estate of all of us. He saw our need and it was (and is) His desire to share His life. Mary had God in her flesh. The fruit of her womb was nestled there because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. Life was incarnated in the womb of the Virgin.

The book of Romans talks about Jesus fathering a new humanity. Just as sin and death came into this creation through one man, Adam, so also righteousness and life would come into this creation through one man, Jesus (Romans 5). It’s all fine and good if that someone were to accomplish this for themselves, i.e. if the Son of God were to live a truly human life, a truly righteous life, for Himself, in our midst. It’s an entirely different matter when everyone on the planet is afforded the privilege of participating in God’s life, receiving God’s life, luxuriating in God’s life. In the beginning, man was made in God’s image. One of the things that that means is that man was created with the capacity to participate in God’s life. God breathed into Adam the breath of life. God breathed into Adam God’s own breath and man became a living creature (Genesis 2:7). Cyril of Alexandria, an early church father (d. 444), taught that God breathed into Adam His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. God’s breath is God’s Spirit.

Adam was perfect, holy, as was Eve. When you hear “perfect” what do you hear? Try to hear these priceless things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Does your soul long for these? Do you have the capacity for these attributes, these gems? There is too much vice in my life. There was too much vice in the lives of the shepherds outside of Bethlehem 2000 years ago. There is too much vice in every sinner’s life. Adam and Eve fell. Sinners are all that women have; children sired by men; it is an immutable

fact. Small or large, in one sense, the amount, the type of sin is immaterial. Large sin, sin left unrestrained, unabated, un-confessed and un-repented, turns into an unholy abomination. There is more vice in our culture than there should be. There is less virtue in our culture than there should be. Have you noticed? Do you care? St. Paul wrote that the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and vice versa (Galatians 5:17). That sounds pretty black and white to me.

St. Paul wrote that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). He continued: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). The fruit of the Spirit; is it in you? Do you “walk” by the Spirit? Love, joy, and peace – I could use a heavy dose of that. How about you? Let’s dispense with one idea straight away. Let’s dispense with the notion that these things are simply warm, subjective feelings in the internal disposition of the heart. The fruit of the Spirit is not that slippery. Love is objective, real, tangible. Joy is a firm construct in God’s own life and He shares His life with us. Peace is a state of being between parties. Our Creator is “the God of peace” (Romans 15:33). This “fruit of the Spirit” is a concrete reality and you’ve been given the capacity to receive these things.

You’re familiar with John 3:16? “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The “so” in that verse, what do you think that it means? Do you believe that it is an exclamation as to the depth, the vastness of His love? It’s a nice sentiment and it’s totally true, but that is not what the words mean. They mean this: God loved the world *in this way*, that He gave us His Son. That is a concrete measure; that is a tangible expression of God’s love. Love has contour and shape and substance and it all flows from Christ’s person. Christ crucified is love. Love that you were created with the capacity to know. Love that you were created with the capacity to receive. The breath which God gave to Adam, Jesus gave back to God when He died on the cross. “‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). The One who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in order to redeem the world gave up His Spirit as He died, having redeemed the world. Love did this. Love bore your selfishness, your greed and your disease. Love rendered up all goodness to His Father and died to save sinners. Love is real, tangible. You eat Divine Love when you receive His body. You drink Love and your soul participates in what it was created to receive when Jesus’ blood is on your lips. What is the product? We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). We crucify selfishness in ourselves. Selfishness is fool’s gold. It is empty and it leaves us forlorn, bereft, adrift. The fruit of the Spirit is love.

My soul cries out for love, joy and peace. Is yours the same as mine? Too much vice and not enough virtue – are you like me? What changes the dynamic? Have you known forgiveness? What does that inspire in you? Mary knew that the Lord saw her, treasured her, blessed her, and that He would use her. She was exultant. The Holy Spirit was the instrument for the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Savior is the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit was in Mary. His life in you brings you joy, I am certain of it. Love, joy, and peace – those things are in you for the benefit of those around you. What Christ gives to you He gives to you to enjoy, for you to know that He is alive in your soul, in the deepest fabric of your being. Love, joy, and peace make you wonderful for those around you. Christ’s life is brought to bear on us by the Holy Spirit and we become wonderful for those around us. That’s not Christian sentimentality; that is God’s design. Money doesn’t grow on trees, but the fruit of the Spirit does. Virtue grows on the

tree of life, on the tree of the cross, on the One who yields His fruit in season and out of season. And it doesn't come piecemeal; the fruit of the Spirit is a unit. Order replaces chaos. Virtue replaces vice. God's Son replaces selfishness and our soul is enriched and those around us are enriched.

Mary received the Holy Spirit without doing anything. In faith, she then set her mind to be a fit vessel for the Messianic King. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). The Holy Spirit has come upon you, through God's Word, to bring the beauty of Christ's life to bear on you. Love, joy, and peace – the real commodities of the Savior's life are "in you" resources unlike any other. So what should we do with these resources? Let's use them. Let's use them well. To the glory of His Holy Name, to the benefit of our neighbor, and for our own delight, we will luxuriate in Love, Joy, and Peace – now and always.