

## WEEK 4 – LOVING HOME (LOVE)

### Sunday – Luke 1:26-38

Special delivery! God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary with news of a miraculous pregnancy – she would bear the Son of God, the eternal King. Mary focuses on the more practical – how can this be? Yet despite the impossibilities and complications, she humbly responds: “Here am I; let it be.” God chose Mary and Joseph to provide the loving family for Jesus Christ.



**THINK:** What were all the complications of Mary’s situation? What complications cause us to doubt or question God? How does the support of those who love us help us when we are unsure?

**PRAY:** Lord, we don’t always understand how you move and work in the world, and in our lives. Yet thy will be done. Help us to answer as Mary did: “Let it be according to your word.” Amen.

**DO:** Have a 15-minute conversation with a teenager. What are they excited about? What are they worried about? How can you encourage them? How do they encourage you?

### Monday – 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16

King David wants to build a temple, a house for God. But God has been perfectly at home moving with the people through the wilderness. Instead, God says that David’s house (family) will be established forever, anticipating the birth of Jesus from David’s descendants 28 generations later (see Matthew 1:17).

**THINK:** What makes a house a family home? What makes a church building feel like God’s home? Where do you experience God’s loving presence?

**PRAY:** Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored. These mercies bless and grant that we may feast in fellowship with thee. Amen. *(traditional dinner prayer attributed to John Wesley)*

**DO:** Share some stories about significant family members, or important places your family has lived.

### Tuesday – Luke 1:46-55

Mary’s prayer is known as the “Magnificat,” because she magnifies the Lord. This joyful prayer celebrates God’s faithful love, and anticipates the topsy-turvy Kingdom of God that her son will declare in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) – God will lift up the lowly and suffering, showing strength in justice.

**THINK:** What is the best God-experience you’ve had? How do you “magnify God” in your life?

**PRAY:** Lord God, help us to remember your mercy, your loving kindness in our daily lives. Where I am haughty, give me a humble heart. Where I am scattered, gather me up. Where I am low, lift me up. Amen.

**DO:** God works through us, as God worked through Mary. Help bring Christ into the world by doing something today to lift up someone who is experiencing a low time in their life.

### Wednesday – Romans 16:25-27

This blessing closes Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, a letter celebrating that God’s grace and salvation are for ALL people, both those who expected it and those who thought they were outside the boundaries of God’s love (aka Gentiles). This is a result of the mystery revealed in Jesus Christ. Advent gives us a sense of the anticipation of that Christmas revelation – which is so stunning we still struggle to fully grasp it.

**THINK:** What seems mysterious to you about God's love for you?

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, we have been waiting long, forgetting God's special love for all the world. Whisper into our hearts the Good News – God sent his son to save us. Christ is born for us, for us! Amen.

**DO:** Watch the animated special, "Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas." To the Grinch, and to most of the Who's of Whoville, the meaning of Christmas was mysterious, deeply buried under glitz and noise. At the end, it is revealed none of those things are necessary to experience the love of others.

## CHRISTMAS EVE – FAMILY HOME (CHRIST)

### Thursday – Luke 1:1-20; John 1:1-14

These two classic Christmas scriptures provide quite a contrast. Luke describes the humble birth of Jesus to poor parents, far from home and sheltering in a stable, and the visit of migrant shepherds. John reminds us that Jesus is actually the divine Christ, God, the Light of the world, come to live among us. Yet there is overlap. The birth described by Luke was so insignificant that most of the world (and especially those living in comfort or power) totally overlooked it. John bluntly says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in him, he gave power to become children of God."



**THINK:** Which Christmas story is harder for you to understand – Luke's gospel of a small-town, back alley birth overshadowed by a world empire? Or John's proclamation that the baby Jesus in the manger is also, somehow, the divine creator and redeemer of the universe? Eugene Peterson's *The Message* paraphrases John 1:14 as, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." What does it mean to have Jesus, God-With-Us, living next door? Or under your own roof, part of the family?

**PRAY:** Dear Lord Jesus Christ, in the wonder of this Christmas Eve, help us to grasp the miracle of your birth – human and divine. Help us to feel your love from above and below: the God who holds the universe in the palm of his hand; yet a baby we can hold in our hands.

**DO:** Sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (UMH 230), paying special attention to verses 3 and 4. Let these words become your prayer this evening. The Norton Hall Band has a nice video if you want to sing along (<https://youtu.be/pD8C7pzZ5Ts>).

*1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;  
above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all on earth!*

*3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given;  
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.*

*4. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
o come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*