

Sunday, December 21, 2025

EMMANUEL—GOD’S LOVE IS WITH US

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus. Matthew 1:19-25

God’s love is one of those things we “know.” Often it sits as background knowledge. Something has to bring it to an appreciation. When there is a demonstration of God’s love, our appreciation of that moment heightens. To be with my grown children who live in Guam and Syracuse is special. Both the effort to come together and the very fact of being together reinforces the love I know. Our love is then more real for the time we are apart.

Every time I hear an angel announcing Jesus to Joseph, I get a renewed sense about the powerful demonstration of God’s love in Jesus. Joseph and others waited a long time for a demonstration of God’s love in Jesus. The name given Jesus was Emmanuel, “God with us.” I am grateful to God for the Emmanuel moment of Jesus’ coming into the world, to be present with us as love. God’s love is no longer distant but is a life changing and life-redirecting knowledge.

Prayer: Dear God, For a love so real in Jesus, we are grateful and we seek to let the world know, really know, You who are true love. May your Emmanuel gift move us to love better and more. Amen

Rev. John Wells

Reprinted from the 1999 Advent Devotional

Monday, December 22, 2025
GOD'S LOVE GUIDES US

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.
Jeremiah 6:16

In a remote region of Tibet, the farewell that someone gives another is “May there be a road.” In that land where snow slides, rockslides and cave-ins are abundant, in that land where roads are casually made and bridges are usually hung from ropes, the wish: “May there be a road” takes on new significance. Of course, we have superhighways but metaphorically life does seem, as Robert Frost noted, “like a pathless wood,” and we spend our lives searching for the road. We move blindly at times yet knowing that we are not alone. God’s gift of love sustains us as we search, and supports us as we move forward— knowing that the road will appear at the time we most long for it. And we will find rest for our souls!

Prayer: Dear God, in the times when the way forward seems obscure, teach us to know that you are guiding us and will show us the way. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Dixie Bowden

Light the fourth candle,
the candle of the Magi,
representing Love



Tuesday, December 23, 2025

CHOOSE LOVE

Though I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. I Corinthians 13: 1-2

Today I heard the choir sing a stunning rendition of “Choose Love.” Their version was beautiful and moved me greatly with the music and these words: “In the midst of pain, I choose love; in the midst of fear, I choose love; in the midst of hate, I choose love.” And it made me wonder: How does one do that? When you are feeling pain or hate or fear, how do you choose love?

I have always thought of love as just a feeling, an emotion that overtakes you. I know better, now, that Jesus and the Bible teach us that love is always a choice, and very much an action, not some uncontrollable emotion. Choosing love is an act of our will — that we make premised on God’s love for us, and his commandments to us. It is a choice we must make if we are to be true disciples of Jesus. (John 13: 34-35) Choosing love then requires further action — choosing love requires showing that love with patience, kindness, perseverance, selflessness, understanding, and hope. It does not expect or require reciprocity. And as Paul warns us, without love, we are no good to anybody, no matter how much faith or hope that we have.

Prayer: Lord, grant me, every day, a bigger heart that I may always be led to choose love. Amen.

Rachel Byrd

Wednesday, December 24, 2025
MUSINGS ON “SILENT NIGHT”

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
Luke 2:8-14

Like many others, the Christmas hymn “Silent Night” has had powerful, evocative meaning to me since I was a child. Every Christmas Eve we would attend the 4pm service at our Episcopal church. The last song was always “Silent Night” by candlelight and I would be positioned right next to my dad as we sang. I cannot hear “Silent Night” without being reminded of him. Then we would go outside to a late December sky that had grown dark as we were inside worshipping. All would gather around the oh-so-high evergreen tree growing in front of the church and “3-2-1”, the lights would be illuminated! Absolutely magical for a young child... Christmas was here!

I lost my dad a few years ago, so Christmas Eve “Silent Nights” are harder for me to sing now. It was only in prayerful preparation for what I’d say at his memorial service that I realized what a true Christian he was... with the heart of a servant — in his church and his community, sharing light and love with others, being a quiet example of what it means to follow and model Jesus. Though his personality was hardly quiet!

I read one particularly miraculous singing of “Silent Night.” The words to the hymn were written in 1816 by a young priest in Austria, Joseph Mohr. The composition evolved and was translated into over 300 languages with many different arrangements for various voices and ensembles. It was sung in churches, in town squares, and even on the battlefield during World War I, when, during a temporary truce on Christmas Eve, soldiers sang carols from home. “Silent Night,” by 1914 known around the world, was sung simultaneously in French, German and English.

Prayer: Dear Lord, this year as we prepare for Christmas, may we each embody a spirit of peace in a world that is increasingly fractious. Your holy Son came into this world to bring peace. As his followers, let us do our part to get along, to stand side by side with others we may or may not agree with, as we spread the good news of his birth. Amen.

Sally Suhr