



Advent 3: The Candle of Love

In looking at the four candles representing Advent, we want to ensure our focus is on the spiritual lessons to be learned.

Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine.

Love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign.

The third candle encapsulates these words written by Christina Rossetti in 1885. It is the message from God who himself is love, that he wanted mankind to know that love through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of his only son. (John 3:16). In English we have only one word that covers all types of love, so we often need to define it. The Greek language has four different words: **Storge** = empathy bond, **Philia** = friend bond, **Eros** = romantic love and **Agape** = unconditional "God" love. It is the **Agape** love that sums up the Christian faith.

God loves us! God loves us unconditionally! That doesn't mean that we can live and do as we like in our relationship with God. As with children in a family: the parents love them unconditionally but will not accept some forms of behaviour leading to a breakdown in the relationship. Love is a two-way association: God loves us and expects our love in return. In **John 13:35** it says: *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* That is why Love came down at Christmas in the form of a baby, that we can know Jesus, God's son, and understand our need of God's forgiveness.

- Do we demonstrate God's love in our lives? In which ways might we do this?
- Do we allow Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to show us what we should be doing?

Read Mark 1

As the first candle represents hope as a light shining in the darkness, and the second candle represents the old testament prophets who foretold the coming of the Prince of Peace, the third candle represents John the Baptist.

In **Isaiah 40:1** we read: *"A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"*

Malachi 3:1 says: *“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come”, says the LORD Almighty.*

Matthew 3:3: confirms these prophecies: *“This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”*

Read Luke 1

It is a long chapter, but it gives a wonderful picture of God’s planning. You may have been surprised to find this third candle representing John the Baptist, but this series of events dovetails with all the other prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah, Jesus. Zacharias, a godly man, and a priest finds himself in the temple because it was his group of priests’ turn on the roster. Each section of priests served at the temple for one week, twice a year. As was the practice, a priest was chosen by lot to burn incense in the Holy Place and because there were so many priests, many never got this opportunity.

The wife of Zacharias, Elizabeth, (cousin of Mary), had been unable to get pregnant and they were getting on in years.

- Does this remind you of another similar situation in the Old Testament?

On this day, as Zacharias stood before the altar, an angel of the Lord (Gabriel), came and gave him an incredible message – verses 5-25.

- What is the message of the angel?
- Why did Zacharias doubt the angel?
- What was this child of theirs going to achieve?

When Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, The angel Gabriel was sent to bring the next announcement of this story when he came to Mary to tell her she would become pregnant by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son whose name would be Jesus.

- The wonderful account of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth in verses 39-45, shows a further link in God’s plan. Read verses 46-45, *The Song of Mary*.
- The rest of the chapter tells us how Zacharias and Elizabeth followed the instruction of the angel, and gave their child the name, John.
- Verses 67-79, Zacharias’ prophecy, is a wonderful song of praise to God. Do we always remember to give thanks? Maybe we wouldn’t do it in such a descriptive way, but the principle of gratitude is important.

Luke 3:1-22

Again, in this chapter we see the prophecies of the Old Testament being manifested through John's ministry.

- How is John described in the words of Isaiah?
- When we read about John preaching to the people, how do we see him preparing the ground for the ministry of Jesus?

There are so many lessons for us to learn from the passages we have read. Examples that we should follow are:

- Understand the greatness of God's love for us, and for the world.
- Living out our faith so that others see that love in us.
- Reaching out to others to minister the love of God.
- Trusting God's word and being obedient by putting it into practice in our lives.
- Always giving thanks for God's wonderful blessings.



Prayer:

Father, thank you for your great love for us. Help us to allow that love to work in our lives so that we too will be messengers of the Gospel.

