

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 18, 2011**

“EVERYTHING WE NEED”

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Advent is God’s Good News: EVERYTHING WE NEED IS BORN ANEW!

There has been a natural and purposeful progression to our Advent preaching. There is good reason for what we do in the Church!

We started with EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR. Because HOPE is at the center of our LIVES and at the center of our FAITH and at the center of ADVENT! And never forget that along with our WISH list, each and every one of us also needs to keep a HOPE list.

We moved into EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR. Because Advent is all about preparation! Preparing to meet and greet our Lord and Savior, and, preparing to walk in God’s kingdom here and now, and in the greater kingdom that is yet to come. Preparation starts in our hearts and our lives, long before we take on the preparation of homes and gifts and all the other assorted parts of this season.

Last week we celebrated EVERYTHING WE REJOICE FOR, with scripture and song. Advent is a time for celebration! The Savior comes! God sent His Son to live among us, as one of us! And we rejoice in God’s grace, and Jesus’ love and the power of the Spirit in our lives. So every time we hear those words of prophesy and the Christmas story retold, we rejoice that God has written this story for us, and we can hear the words and sing the songs over and over again.

And this week we bring Advent to a close with EVERYTHING WE NEED. We really have saved the best for last! Later on this morning our children will lead us in worship with song and recitation and the Living Nativity. For some of us, that really is ALL WE NEED. Because when the Christmas story is told by children, the powerful but simple meaning of that story really comes to life. As we gather for this time of worship, we pause to pull together all the themes of Advent. HOPE and PREPARATION and REJOICING all come together, when we stop to realize that EVERYTHING we need in our lives, is summed up in one word and one action by our God. The phrase is very simple: GOD IS LOVE! And EVERYTHING we need is found in God’s LOVE!

So let’s begin with a question: What would we do for the ones we love? We might be better off asking the question: What wouldn’t we do for the ones we love? There comes a time when it’s not enough to simply say: I LOVE YOU! Words can seem empty without actions to back them up. A constant theme in love songs is the celebration of a visible display for all to see. Love is: the thousand yellow ribbons on the old oak tree! Love is: the vow that says there is no mountain too high, no river too wide, no valley too low, to keep us from those we love. And who can forget: ALL WE NEED IS LOVE? That is what love LOOKS like.

And if we can understand love as being that real, then what is God’s love for the world all about? We find it spelled out in Mary’s song of praise, from Luke chapter 1. Why does my soul proclaim the greatness of the Lord? Why does my spirit rejoice in God my Savior? SIMPLE: Because the Lord does look with favor on His servants!

Because the Almighty has done great things for us!

Because we have been shown mercy a thousand times over!

Because the strength of our God does lift up the humble of heart!

Because our Father does fill the hungry!

And because the Lord our God has made promises to His children that He will keep!

And what is Christmas love all about?

As we celebrate Advent and Christmas, we know and believe where God's love is leading us. This love might begin with the warm and fuzzy picture of a starlit manger, but it points to the other end of this story, and a Friday we call "GOOD" and a CROSS on a hill. God knows what He's doing! His extravagant love for us is clearly seen in His willingness to give us the most precious gift of all. The gift of His own Son!

The price is great! The gift of Christmas is that God looks at the cost without blinking. God does indeed care enough to send the very best. And THE BEST is the gift of Jesus, this bundle of love, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

It's the gift of love that makes the angels sing!

It's the gift of love that makes shepherds run to see!

It's the gift of love that makes the wise travel to worship and adore!

It's the gift of love that continues to bless us today and everyday!

This love is an "ALWAYS" love, and that makes it EVERYTHING WE NEED! This is not a conditional love! There is no prenuptial agreement here! This is PERFECT love! God was willing to give His Son Jesus to a world that had no idea what they were getting, or how good they were getting it. This is what God would do for love: He would give the most precious gift of all. And all of this is what God did, just to remind us of the covenant that He made from the very beginning of time, but which He needs to remind us of over and over again. I AM YOUR GOD, YOU ARE MY PEOPLE.

And even though this love will never go away, there is the other side to life, that we all know full well. STUFF HAPPENS! And when STUFF HAPPENS it does not mean that God's love has failed. It means that God's love is there even more, to get us through the STUFF that HAPPENS. God's love is steadfast, strong and true. We can count on His love, no matter what!

EVERYTHING WE NEED will be arriving in just a matter of days, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Together with the angels we can sing GLORY TO GOD!

Together with the shepherds we can COME TO WORSHIP HIM!

Together with the Wise Men we can TRAVEL THE DISTANCE TO PRAISE HIM on bended knee!

And together with all of God's creation we can pray that the LOVE GOD SHOWS US, will be the LOVE WE SHOW THE WORLD around us!

EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR!

EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR!

EVERYTHING WE REJOICE FOR!

EVERYTHING WE NEED!

Because in the end, that is our only HOPE, for PREPARING our world, to REJOICE in God's love, which alone can bring PEACE ON THE EARTH!

And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!