

God's Elaborate Love

Is 52:7-10 (*Mass During the Day*)
Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 (*Mass During the Day*)
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 (*Vigil Mass*)
Luke 2:15-20 (*Mass at Dawn*)

One of my favorite parts of doing marriage preparation with engaged couples is listening to the stories of how the men proposed to their girlfriends. So often, these stories include very elaborate plans, requiring precise execution. For example, one young man spent hours rigging a video projector and DVD player to an ATV. Then, he hung what looked like a bed sheet to a railroad bridge. Using the ATV, he took his girlfriend on a picnic near dusk and, after eating, he repositioned the ATV and began showing a slide show of their dating pictures. He then asked her to marry him. Isn't that awesome?!

It was not so much the pictures that demonstrated the young man's love for his girlfriend, but rather, the elaborate work he did just to say, "I love you." Hopefully, most of us here have been the recipient, as well as the giver, of elaborate love. It may have been a child devising an elaborate scheme to show his parents that he loves them; or, a husband secretly planning a special date to remind his wife that he loves her; or, a woman expressing her elaborate love for another by rearranging her schedule to accommodate the other person's needs and schedule. While *spontaneous* expressions of love are nice, there is no greater way to show someone we love them than by letting our love be *elaborate*.

Today, we celebrate the fact that **God's love is elaborate**. What exactly does that mean? Well, the Merriam-Webster dictionary gives us some insight into the reality of God's love by defining the adjective "elaborate," as something "1) planned or carried out with great care and 2) marked by complexity, fullness of detail, or ornateness."¹ God's love is "planned [and] carried out with great care;" it is complex, detailed, and ornate. This is what we celebrate at Christmas! God showed us His elaborate love in a concrete, tangible way through the Incarnation—the Word becoming flesh—the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ! To fully appreciate how elaborate God's love is, we have to know how, centuries before the birth of Christ, God was planning and executing something amazing for us.

There are numerous places in the Bible that remind us that the Incarnation was not an accident, and not even a spontaneous expression of love, but rather, an *elaborate* plan of love. For example, eight centuries before the birth of Christ, God spoke through the prophet Micah, saying, "But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:1). In the Gospel of Luke, we hear this prophecy fulfilled with the birth of Christ taking place in the most unlikely of places, Bethlehem, and under unusual circumstances.²

Like Micah, most of the book of the prophet Isaiah was written in the eighth century B.C. and described God's elaborate love. For example, we read that "the Lord himself will give [us] this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, which states, "Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18). The author of Matthew was himself aware of the elaborate nature of God's plan and love as he wrote, "All this took

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Elaborate>

² Luke 2:4-7

place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us’” (Matthew 1:22-23).

Two other important Scripture passages to note regarding God’s elaborate, well-planned, ornate love for us include Jesus’ words to the two men on the road to Emmaus. The author of Luke tells us that Christ explained the Father’s elaborate love for humanity—“Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Christ] interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Also, in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, we read a history of how God has been at work in the faith of His people, carefully executing a plan of love and salvation that culminated in the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. In addition to these, there are dozens of Scripture verses that testify to the fact that God has been elaborately and lovingly scheming our salvation for a very long time.

God’s elaborate love did not end with the birth of Christ or even with the death and resurrection of Christ. It continues today. One of the ways that you and I truly come to know in our hearts—not just in our heads—that we are loved and cherished by God is when we come to realize the elaborateness of His love for us. Typically, we come to see this and understand it through prayer. It is when we prayerfully reflect on the various things that have recently gone on in our lives that we begin to see the amount of effort, care, and detail that God puts into reminding us that He loves us.

A woman recently shared with me one of her own experiences of God’s elaborate love. For the sake of brevity, I’ll pick up the story with Betsy backing out of her driveway with her three-year-old grandson, Jaxen, as the passenger. Jaxen looked through the moon-roof of the vehicle and saw the moon and said, “There’s God.” Betsy was touched by her grandson’s awareness of God and asked him, “Jaxen, does God ever talk to you?” He responded, “Yes.” She asked him, “Is He saying anything to you right now?” Jaxen said, “God is saying, ‘Hi!’” Jaxen’s innocence and openness to God obviously touched his grandmother and reminded her that God is near.

Several weeks later, Betsy was awake at 5am, praying quietly in her bed room. For several months, her bedroom had become her place of prayer because her daughter, son-in-law and three grandchildren currently live with her. While she struggled in prayer to listen to God, her grandson, Jaxen, quietly opened the door and walked over to Betsy and crawled into her lap. She sat there, snuggled with her grandson, and neither of them said a word.

Remembering the many times the moon had spoken of God’s presence in her life, Betsy scooped her grandson up, wrapped a blanket around the two of them, and walked out into the brisk darkness of her back porch. There was a full moon. The two of them looked up, and again, the three year old pointed to the moon and said, “Look Grammy, there’s God.” Betsy asked Jaxen if God was saying anything and he said yes. Betsy asked him what God was saying and there was a pause. In the silence, Betsy wondered why her prayer had been so discombobulated and she silently asked God, “What do You want to tell me?” Immediately, Jaxen reported what God was saying, whispering in his grandmother’s ear, “I love you.”

One of the things I love about this story is that it shows how elaborate God’s love is for us. He spent *weeks* setting the stage for this short, but amazing moment when Betsy would ask God what He was trying to tell her and He would speak His words through a tiny child, “I love you.”

The birth of Christ reminds us that, not only does God love us, but His love for us is elaborate. As we celebrate the birth of our Redeemer this Christmas Season, let’s look for ways—elaborate ways—to share that love with others.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Hebrews chapter 11. Write a new paragraph to this chapter, describing your own faith, the faith of your family, and what God has done for you.
- ✚ Think of at least one time when you experienced God’s *elaborate* love for you and, as you reflect on it, pay attention to what stirs in your heart. Share it with God.