

## The Love of Christmas

**“In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” “We love because he first loved us.”**

**— 1 John 4:9, 19 ESV**

Advent is a time to reflect on the truth revealed by the Apostle John: God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16). “Advent” means the arrival of a notable person or event, and in the four weeks before Christmas, we remember how Christ came to save us. Mankind’s rebellion caused separation and spiritual darkness; yet in the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World dispels the darkness and restores mankind’s relationship with God. The light of the Advent candles are testimony to the light Christ brings to a fallen world. The purple candles remind us of the royal status of the King of kings, who set aside the privileges of being the Son of God and took the form of a servant in human flesh. He humbled himself because he loved us.

### **The birth of Jesus, the Light of the World dispels the darkness**

We light a pink candle (the “joy candle”) on the third week of Advent. This color reminds us of the joy of the season, as God demonstrates his love in such a wonderful way. To those who receive him, he gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12). We experience deep and unshakable joy because he loved us. We light the white candle (the “Christ candle”) on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. This color reminds us of the purity of Christ, whose perfect sacrifice brings peace between God and man. For those who trust in what Christ has done, the crimson stain of sin is made white like snow (Isaiah 1:18). We are spiritually clean because he loved us. In the weeks preceding Christmas, many people celebrate sentimental expressions of love. Christians move beyond mere sentimentalism. We love from the firm foundation of experiencing the love of God in Christ. His love colors and shapes every aspect of life. In him, we demonstrate humility and joy. Cleansing cannot come from saying the right thing. Or doing the right thing. Justification is by faith alone. The failure and guilt of the believer is attributed to Christ. This year as you remember the birth of Christ, let the words of the hymn writer Josiah Conder move you to practical expressions of thanksgiving and love:

‘Tis not that I did choose thee, for, Lord, that could not be;  
this heart would still refuse thee, hadst thou not chosen me.  
Thou from the sin that stained me hast cleansed and set me free;  
of old thou hast ordained me, that I should live to thee.

‘Twas sov’ reign mercy called me and taught my op’ning mind;  
the world had else enthralled me, to heav’nly glories blind.  
My heart owns none before thee, for thy rich grace I thirst;  
this knowing, if I love thee, thou must have loved me first.