

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025

Learning from Elizabeth

Amy Cook

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."

—Luke 1:41-44

I have a lot to learn from Elizabeth.

Luke's gospel begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth, both described as "righteous" people but childless. In their day, children were the sign of God's blessing and their lack of a child specifically cast doubt on Elizabeth. She is the one labeled "barren" and she must live with this shame and suspicion even though she is known for blameless living. Zechariah is chosen by chance that year as the priest to enter the holiest place in the temple. While in this holiest of places an angel appears and says that Elizabeth is going to have a son. Zechariah immediately questions the angel and is struck mute for his doubting until the baby is born. Elizabeth does conceive and in her sixth month Mary comes to visit.

I imagine at the time of Mary's visit Elizabeth is bursting with news. Her place in society has changed. She is no longer looked at with suspicion or pity. By having a child, Elizabeth erases the whispers of God's punishment. This is probably the most exciting time of her life, but she is now married to a man who can't talk! In this moment of extreme joy and new life, Elizabeth and Mary meet and I'm sure she is longing for conversation.

If I were Elizabeth in this moment, I would have been tempted to run to Mary and start gushing about the greatest thing that has ever happened in my life. But Elizabeth does something different. She doesn't



Monday, December 22, 2025

Love as the Foundation of Generous Living

*Let us not love with words or speech
but with actions and in truth.*

—1 John 3:18 (NIV)

Love Came Down at Christmas is the title of a Christmas poem written by Christina Rossetti in 1885. The words have been put to music by several composers and are sung in many churches during the Christmas season.

Here is the final verse of the poem: *Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love to God and others, love for plea and gift and sign.*

The poem is a reminder, along with the above passage, that love is more than words or feelings. Love is most fully expressed in action. The birth of Jesus into our world is God’s ultimate act of generous love.

As we have seen during this Advent journey, generosity, gratitude, hospitality, and love are best expressed in what we do and how we treat one another. We love because God first loved us, and our desire is to then share that love with others so that “love shall be our token.”

This connection between love and action is what distinguishes authentic love from mere sentiment. Anyone can say loving words, but it takes commitment and sacrifice to demonstrate love through generous actions. The Christmas story itself is the ultimate example of love in action—God’s love made manifest in the incarnation of Jesus.

Making it Personal: What speaks to you in the scripture verse from 1 John and the final verse of *Love Came Down at Christmas*? In these last few days before Christmas, how might you express love “with actions and in truth”? Today, look for one specific way to demonstrate love through a generous action rather than just words.

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

Love and Serenity

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Many churches held “longest night” services this past week to honor many people who are grieving during the holidays because of change or loss, often in the past year. With pressure to feel a certain way during this season, feelings of sadness and loss can be especially hard to carry.

Perhaps you are experiencing a challenging change. Maybe it is your first Christmas without a special person present. Or you just don’t have the “Christmas spirit” this year.

The Serenity Prayer offers wise guidance about finding peace amid change and worry. It reminds us there’s a difference between what we can control and what we cannot, and that wisdom lies in knowing the difference.

While the how, where, and with whom we celebrate Christmas changes throughout our lives, the true meaning of Christmas never changes. It is the love of God made manifest through Jesus. This love provides us, through acceptance, courage, and wisdom, the opportunity to find serenity even when facing different circumstances.

Love provides the foundation for serenity because it assures us we’re not alone, regardless of circumstances. God’s love is constant even when everything else changes. Even in loss or difficulty, we can practice generous love—sometimes accepting help from others or being present to our own pain with compassion.

Making it Personal: How do the words of the Serenity Prayer speak to you this season? How might you cultivate serenity, courage, and wisdom, connecting with deeper spiritual aspects of Christmas? Today, identify one thing you cannot change and accept it with love, and one thing you can change and take generous action.

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2025

Making Room for Love

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped
him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger,
because there was no room for them in the inn.*

—Luke 2:7

Amy Cook's reflection last Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, was an inspiring culmination of everything we have been learning about practicing generosity with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. As she so beautifully described in her reflection on Elizabeth's response to her cousin, Mary, the practice of generosity involves an intentional decision to make space for others and for God.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are times when we are often filled with many emotions. If we are not mindful, it is easy to make these days all about us and our emotional needs. Amy's reflection reminds us that there is a different choice we can make. We can be more like Elizabeth, who made it her priority to create space for Mary's emotions and to make room for Mary to share her news.

In addition to creating space for others today and tomorrow, it is also important for us to remember to pause and create space to give thanks for God's generosity. As we hear the Christmas story where there was no room in the inn for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, we are reminded to make room in our own hearts and schedules for prayer and worship this evening and/or tomorrow. As we make room, we help create the space to receive God's gift of the birth of Jesus into our lives.

The irony of the Christmas story is that while there was no room in the inn, there was room in the hearts of humble shepherds, wise men, and others who recognized the significance of this birth. The question for us is not whether we have perfect circumstances, but whether we have room in our hearts for love. Making room for love requires intentional choices about how we organize our time, energy, and priorities—it engages our mind in service of our heart.

Christmas Day

December 25, 2025

Receiving the Gift of God's Generous Love

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

—John 1:1-5, 14

During our journey together through the season of Advent, we have focused on how we can practice generosity with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Our shared journey has brought us on this day to the celebration of the most generous gift of all—the gift of God's love for us expressed through the birth of Christ.

At the beginning of our journey, Randall Curtis invited us to avoid the cultural distractions that pull us away from focusing on a life of generosity. Shannon Kelly showed us that practicing gratitude and practicing generosity are intimately connected. Wendy Claire Barrie reflected on how deeply Mary's response to God modeled generosity. And Amy Cook inspired us with a fresh interpretation of the story of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, illuminating how important it is to create space for one another's stories.

Today we focus on receiving the gift of generosity—specifically God's generous gift of the love of Christ. Listen anew to the opening words of John's gospel. Use the lens of what we have learned about the root meaning of the word *generosity*—to give birth, to create a new beginning.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

