*This document is an AI transcription of an audio recording and may contain errors; refer to the audio recording for accuracy.*

Heavenly Father, we thank You. We thank You for this love that You have shown to us, that this love that You have demonstrated to us. Please teach us about Your love, fill our hearts with it. And as I speak to my brothers and sisters today, I pray that You would open their spiritual ears to Your words, that they would hear the things You have to say. Help us all to learn from You and Your Holy Spirit today. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen. All right. Well, today's Advent message is love. Jesus Christ coming down to earth, born to a virgin. This is a message of love. But why is it a message of love? I mean, babies are born all the time, and according to the Bible, it's not the first time God has been on earth. So why is this such a message of love? Well, to begin with, we're going to read from Leviticus 26, 12. "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people." Revelation 21, 4 says, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." And Deuteronomy 7, 6 says, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." The first point that we have to understand when understanding the message of the gospel is that you were created to be in relationship with God. There are other religions in the world who think that God just created the world, set it in motion, and then just set it adrift off down into the universe and never looked back. But that is not the truth. That is not how things actually work. God created Adam and Eve in the garden, and then He dwelt with them in the garden. And later on when He took the children of Israel and He dwelt with them, His presence was there in the temple because He is a God who wants to be with His people because He is a relational God and He has a relational type of love. And this is...one time I talked about the Westminster shorter catechism, which is kind of a famous document, right? It says the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And that's the truth. We are built and created to be in relationship with God. But obviously sometimes people don't feel in that relationship. And why is that? Well, Isaiah 59.2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear." He wants to be in relationship with us, but we are separated because of our sin. And what are we to do about that? Well, John 14.6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" And Isaiah 53.5 says, "But He," meaning Jesus, "was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." See the second important part of this message is the understanding why the Advent is love is that Jesus came to restore our relationship with God. We are created to be in that relationship. We fell out of it because of sin, but Jesus came to restore it. You see, it's not just the birth of Jesus that is the message of love. It is the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which is why this is the greatest message of love ever told. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. And as Jesus said, 'I have called you friends.'" That's where we, the Society of Friends, get our name from. Laying down your life for someone is the greatest act of love, and Jesus' birth was the first step in God demonstrating the greatest act of love towards us. You see, God's love is a relational kind of love. Jesus could have simply come down to earth as a man and explained how amazing God was and said, "He is so amazing, now you must love Him because He is worthy of all glory and honor and praise." There's no doubt. But rather than just tell us about the love and ask for it and demand it, He demonstrated that love. And that's because He's a relational God and He has a relational love. And because we were created in His image, we understand this kind of love. It's the love that we know, it's the love, the language that we speak. When you fall in love with a person in this world, you begin to spend time with them and you begin to say nice things to them and give them gifts and hold their hand and we try to woo the love of the object of our affection. And this is human nature, as we say, because we were created in God's image and it's also God's nature. God speaks this language of relational love where He tries to woo us. Jesus came and lived the life that we needed to live but couldn't and He died the death that we deserved to die. One of the names of Jesus is Immanuel, which we sang that song today, which is a great song. It means God with us. God with us. And when Jesus came down and was born to Mary all those years ago, it was God with us. Jesus came to be God with us. But more than that, He came to reestablish God with us. He wasn't just going to be Immanuel, He was going to establish Immanuel. John chapter 14 verse 9 says, "Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" He jumped down to verse 16 and it says, "And I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper that He may abide with you forever the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and He will be in you. I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you a little while longer and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.'" And finally Acts 4.31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness." You see our third point is that our relationship with God begins today. God with you begins the moment that you're filled with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was, when Jesus died on the cross, the moment He died, the veil in the Jewish temple, the veil that split the presence of God from His people, that veil was torn, signifying that God's presence could now be with His people. I've been trying to prepare a lesson for the youth group about clearly and confidently preaching the gospel. And so I've been doing a lot of reading and researching what people's definitions of the gospel and how they present it. And a common problem that I've run into, and I've run into this all throughout, you know, I was in YWAM for a while doing missionary stuff and something that I see over and over is that people have a tendency to preach a get out of jail gospel. They say, "Do you know where you're going when you die? And without Jesus you're going to be going to hell." And this is true. This is true. But the problem is that getting to heaven when we die is just such a small part of what the gospel message is. What we have in Christ is not just being saved from fire somewhere down the road. In Christ, our relationship with God is reestablished today. Jesus died for more than just saving you from a fire somewhere down the road. He died so that your purpose, the thing you were created for, which is being reestablished with God, the thing that was separated from you because of your sin, could be repaired and fixed. And that once again, just like Adam in the garden with God, you can be reunited with God today and you can walk and talk with God today. Your life right now can be filled with love and joy and peace and the presence of God. This is the true essence of what Christ died for. You can figure out if you've been a victim of the get out of jail gospel with a simple little test. If you can imagine heaven without God, then you've been a victim of the get out of jail gospel. We've probably all spent at least some time trying to imagine what heaven is going to be like. And if you ask someone on the street, they're going to say everything from cheesecake heaven to roller coaster land to just an unending rock and roll concert. But once you have experienced the real living presence of God and once you have tasted that goodness, all of the things in this world that we enjoy pale in comparison to that presence and that true essence of it's what we were created for. And once you have experienced relationship with God, nothing in heaven, no heaven that you could ever imagine would ever compare to a heaven that has God in it. And so if you are thinking of a heaven and God's just kind of there, then you may be missing out. I can imagine lots of good things but when I first, as they say, taste and see that the Lord is good, once I first had that experience, I knew that heaven had to be me with God. And if you haven't tasted and seen, if you haven't had that experience yet, then it's my prayer that today and this week that you will take the time and sit down with God and say, "Alright God, I need to know. I want to know what this is all about. I need to have your Holy Spirit in me and I need to know what I was created to be. Pray for revelation. Search the Scriptures for truth to see what the Bible says about you." But there's something more. 2 Corinthians 5.20 says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God." And Matthew 28.19-20, known as the Great Commission, says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." The fourth important part of this message is we are called to lead others into relationship with us and God. Once you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, you're going to realize how empty all those other things in your life were and how you were trying to fill yourself with TV and hobbies and whatever else helps you get through the day. And then you're going to have this encounter, this experience with God and then you're going to look out there at all the people who are filling their lives with those empty hollow things and it's going to break your heart because you will finally have your eyes open and you'll see that those people aren't experiencing everything they were created for. And you should begin to have a burden to reach out to those people. And if you find yourself without that burden, then it's possible that your relationship with God has grown cold and it's sort of the reverse boiling frog thing. The water's been cooling off and we haven't noticed. I've always had a very hard time with evangelization, telling our society makes it awkward and difficult to talk about Jesus. The Prince of Peace for some reason is awkward in conversation and that's part of the society we live in. And it's because Jesus is light and he makes manifest the darkness in our lives and people don't want that. They don't want their darkness made manifest. And so I understand that to bring up Jesus is to bring up the fact that people are sinners and that they are hurt and lost and dying. And so I know evangelism is hard, but once you have found something true and real, once you have the Holy Spirit in you and it is bringing you life, then you become compelled. You do crazy things like become the interim pastor without any training. So it could be that your whole life you have just thought that this whole Christianity thing is just a build up to something in the future and that you've never experienced the truth the day. So if that is you, then please you can come ask one of us for prayer and ask us to what we'll pray that God will give you a fresh revelation of his presence and his truth right here today. Or you can just go home and in your quiet time, just meditate and say, God, I need this thing. I want to know this truth. I still feel that hole inside of me that says I'm not what I was created to be and seek him out in your prayer time. But it could be that you had that experience before, but that you've kind of grown cold and grown away from that. And if so, I just want to encourage you get back into it and rediscover. I wish I looked up that verse, but there's a verse that says, remember, oh man, something about remember the fire, remember the love you once had, remember the way you love things in the beginning. And if anyone knows that verse, you can shout it out, but it's okay. I can't remember it either. But that's the gist of the verse is that remember the fire you had at the beginning. Remember when you first realized when it first clicked in your head that Christ was real and that he was with you and you just filled with that fire and passion and eagerness. If you've lost that, then seek God in prayer and seek the scriptures to rekindle that flame because Jesus came to earth to reestablish your relationship with God today. When he is real, he will begin to reign in your life. He will transform your speech. The things you say and do, the way you treat other people will all be touched and blessed by the real living presence of God. When he is your greatest treasure, then it will be easy for you to give away your earthly treasures because you know that you have something greater. He wants a relationship with you today. You will have salvation later on, but that's not all this is about. So pray, ask for a renew, ask for a rekindle, and if you feel if you're full of the Holy Spirit, then I just would encourage and implore you to continue to go out into the world and share that real true thing that you have found with the people in your life, the people at your job and at your favorite restaurant or wherever. And let's bring the real relationship with God into the lives of this world because that is the message of love that we have in this Christmas season. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you are not just one of the old phony baloney, mythical, logical gods who demands things of us but gives nothing in return. We thank you so much that you are God who is relational and that your purpose, your joy for us is to be in relationship with us, to have your own people and to be our God. And I pray right now, God, for every brother and sister here that if they have never experienced that or if they've forgotten what it tastes like that you will please go into each and every one of our hearts and fill us with your Holy Spirit. I ask that as we go through this week you will just continuously remind us to turn our hearts and minds back to you to constantly walk with you and walk in your spirit. Fill us afresh with your fire. In Jesus name, Amen. [BLANK\_AUDIO]