

CHRISTMAS 2025 SERMON REV. BILL VAN OSS

You just heard the greatest love story ever told. It's the story of God's love for the world and for all the people in it. You just heard that God became human when Mary said "yes" to God's invitation to be the God-bearer, so that love would take flesh and be born into our world – not in a fancy palace but in a humble stable. He would be Emmanuel – God with us – visited by lowly shepherds.

God so loves the world, and all the people in it, that God became a human being, Jesus Christ, who would teach and heal, challenge and forgive, lift up and feed, and sacrifice His life so that God's Kingdom of Justice, love and peace might come on earth as it is in heaven. The story of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ, God's Son, Emmanuel, is the greatest love story ever told.

But here's the thing: the story did not begin on that cold, starry night in Bethlehem. This story began "in the beginning" – as far back as time goes. "In the beginning" there was only God. And God was lonely and a little bored, and so God said: "I think I'll make me a world." So God planted a beautiful garden filled with all kinds of plants and creatures, but that wasn't quite enough and so God looked in the mirror and God made creatures in God's own image and likeness. God made people, and God said "oh, this is very, very good." People in God's own image living in that beautiful garden.

God made those people good, and God made them free – free to choose to love Creator God, and also free to try to be God. Free to love God and each other. Free to live in peace and harmony. Free to live respectfully and generously. But also free to live selfishly.

And sadly, those first people chose to turn their backs on God and each other, and they were put out of the garden.

But God did not give up on them. They might have turned their backs on God, but God would never turn God's back on them, because God loved them.

God sent patriarchs and matriarchs and prophets to lead, to warn, to teach the people God's ways. God led the people out of slavery in Egypt and gave them manna and water when they were hungry and thirsty. God gave the people the Law so that they would know how to live together in peace and harmony. God relented to having a temple when they clamored for one, even though God can never be pinned down. God gave them kings, even though God warned them against that, through the prophets, because kings quickly forget God and try to be God.

In this epic love story that began in that beautiful garden, God was with God's beloved every step of the way, loving and giving, even though people kept turning their backs on God and living selfishly.

So God sat down once again and wondered what to do next. And it happened. God thought, "I know, I'll become one of them." I'll become love-in-the-flesh to show them, to teach them, how to live and how to love.

And so it happened – Christmas. God came as a tiny baby through a teenage girl living in an occupied land. The greatest love story ever told continued to unfold in the most profound of ways in Jesus...

But here's the thing – and this is really important. The story doesn't end there. The story doesn't end in the stable. It doesn't even end when they tried to kill love on the cross – the story continues through us.

For just as God came long ago seeking a home in Mary's womb, and in that stable, God is looking for a home tonight/today. God – love – is looking for a home in our heart so that God's love might come into the world, once again, and over and over, in and through us.

God seeks a home in our heart so that God's love might live and grow through our hands and feet and voice, through our words and actions, through our love for each other and for God.

God became human in Jesus, the humble child of Bethlehem, long ago to show us, once again, that God's love is everlasting and unconditional, and tonight/today God wants us to have this kind of love for each other, so that our world might look a little more like how God created it to be.

For this is the greatest love story ever told, and we can all be a part of it each and every day.

Let us pray-

God of love, we thank you for never giving up on us or on our world. We thank you for all the ways you have been faithful and shown us how to be the people you created us to be.

We thank you also for the love that came down on Christmas long ago that continually seeks to break into our lives and into our world. Help us to live into the fullness of your love and to be agents of that love, so that it might grow and spread and heal our world.

We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, since the beginning of time... Amen