

**Rev. Steve Gillam, Wall Street United Church,**

**December 27<sup>th</sup> 2025**

**"Noel c'est l'amour... Um, la la la da da da..."**

That's one of my favourite Christmas songs, but I only know the first three words. "*Noel c'est l'amour.*" Christmas is love! And, it is, isn't it! It is my sincere wish and prayer that you get to spend some time during this Christmas season with loved ones, whoever they may be, family, friends, neighbours, chosen family ... celebrate with those you love. Maybe you'll cuddle up with someone, with your favourite beverage, and watch a Christmas movie. Or curl up on the sofa with some hot chocolate with your kids or grandkids watching "*Frozen*" for the 400th time!

But, in the light of this candle, a candle for love, we acknowledge that the love that we celebrate during this season, the love that we're talking about today, is about so much more. As wonderful as sharing with loved ones is, Christmas is about sharing with all of God's beloved. And you are God's beloved.

"For God so loved the world..." that God's love, God's word, God's intention for all of life, breaks into our lives, our world, in a Bethlehem baby whose birth we celebrate this season. And in many times before and since. This light reminds us of the incarnation of God's love, God's love made flesh and experienced in acts of peace and justice, love that transforms us and our world.

On the first Sunday of Advent, we are reminded that Advent can be disturbing. Yes it can! It calls us to see ourselves, see others, and see

the world in a new way. To experience all of that through God's love. And that can be disturbing. Unsettling.

Because God's love colours outside the lines. (Did you gasp? At least quietly inside?) We are taught *not* to colour outside the lines, literally and figuratively. It's a great hymn, and a powerful metaphor.

When I was a kid, I didn't like colouring books. I loved arts and crafts. I loved colouring. But give me a good box of crayons and *blank* paper. I was never good at colouring inside the lines. Well, I was good at it, but it didn't do anything for me. But for some people it's easier. Safer.

And figuratively speaking, a love that colours outside the lines is also a challenge. But it is what we are called to do. Especially now as we get ready to welcome the incarnation of love. Let every heart prepare Him room!

How do we do that? Let's take a look at some examples from our sacred story. The scripture stories of this season speak to us of this colouring outside the lines of love, and that is God's love.

We start with the passage from Matthew. He tells the nativity story from Joseph's perspective. And we heard again that Joseph is concerned. He is pledged in marriage to Mary, but he has just discovered that she is pregnant, and the baby isn't his. He decides to quietly break off the engagement.

First, we need to know that at this time getting married happened in two phases. First, the official marriage contract was signed. It made the marriage legally binding. Then later there would be a celebration feast, after which the bride would move in with the husband. Joseph and Mary are in this in-between phase. Their relationship is official. Legally binding. The English translations of this story use the

word engaged, or betrothed, or pledged, or even espoused. But it's more than these words imply. A legal divorce is required now to end this marriage.

We're told that Joseph was a good and faithful man who did what was right. That meant obeying the Law of Moses. Adultery was grounds for divorce. And also, possibly, death.

That makes me think of the story of a group of men bringing to Jesus a woman accused on adultery. They are ready to stone her (execute her by throwing heavy stones on her). Jesus kneels down and starts writing in the dirt, and the accusers read it, and turn away. But what did he write? Is it a private message to this woman to reassure her? Is it a moment of meditation? Is he stalling before commenting? I have begun to wonder if in that moment he is recalling hearing the story told in Matthew's gospel. Did he know about Joseph's struggle? Does he, in this moment, think about how his mother could have been in the same predicament?

So, Joseph, a man who is faithful to the law and does the right thing, decides to colour outside the lines. His love for Mary is greater than doing what he is expected to do. He isn't leaving her, he's saving her. And when he makes that decision, he creates a space for God's message from the angel. His bold love opens him up to hearing good news.

And then we have the nativity story told by Luke. The baby Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Now, we've all seen the plays or movies, and heard the story. We have an image of the holy family in a stable outside the crowded inn. But the story only tells us that Jesus was placed in a manger (an animal feeding trough) because there was no room in the

inn. In fact the word translated to "inn" could also mean a guest room. Joseph went to Bethlehem for the census because he was from there. Is it a stretch to imagine that he would be staying with family? Are there so many relatives all home for the same reason that there was no better place for Mary and Jesus than the family's stable? Is it possible that Jesus wasn't born in some cold dark place, but at home surrounded by relatives? It's a bit outside the lines, but I'm happy with that thought.

Of course Jesus would live this love all his life. He coloured outside the lines of social and religious expectation. He loved, regardless of gender or age. Regardless of social status or nationality or health. He loved those forgotten, ignored, outcast. He even startled his disciples by washing their feet the night he gave them a new commandment:

"Love one another as I have loved you."

This is the love we embrace this season. This is the love that defines us, a love that colours outside the lines. A love that is bigger than human boundaries, bigger than our fear, bigger than all of the "it's just not done" comments that keep us safely within the lines.

As we approach the end of Advent, may we take the time to open ourselves to God's love, for ourselves and for the world. In doing so, we — like Joseph — will make space within our souls to hear the angels sharing God's promise.

God bless us on our journeys.