



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Advent Week 1
Just Imagine...Exponential
Love

Luke 1.46–55

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WORSHIP THEME

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Last Advent we explored how we can “regift” God’s love, and even practiced regifting with \$20. The stories we heard were amazing! We saw—in real life—how one gift can make a difference and spread literally around the world.

That prompted us to think not only about how love can spread, but also how it can be multiplied, exponentially! Think about it...when we receive God’s love, we can then pass that love on. And here’s the miraculous part: no love is lost when it is passed on! Instead, love grows and grows exponentially. Imagine if one small act of love were passed from one person to two people and they shared it with two people, then they share with two, and so on. If this love were passed just 12 times, 4,096 people would receive it, to say nothing of how the depth of love might grow the same!

The birth of Jesus is a lot like that.

LUKE 1.46–55

And Mary said,
‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for God has looked with favor on the humble state (lowliness)
of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is God’s name.

God’s mercy is for those who stand in awe (fear) him
from generation to generation.

God has shown strength with his arm;

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

God has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

God has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

TRUE BUT NOT FACTUAL?

There is so much I want to say this morning. There is this magnificent scripture and this idea of exponential love, and I hardly know how to fit it all in. I'll do my best.

First, let's look at this scripture. Before we begin with that, I want to put us in the **right frame of mind** for looking at this scripture and all of Jesus' birth narratives.

We are not going to read them literally.

- I'm not interested in defending the birth story as factual—given that we have multiple stories in three different gospels. Virgin births were nothing new in that era as tools used to describe someone who literally seemed “out of this world.”
- I'm also not interested in tearing it apart as non-factual—that is not the point of why they were written. **They were written to convey that something big happened!** They can be read as parable. When we get too wrapped up in the debate over literalism, we miss the whole point. And so, what is the point of this scripture?

They break the normalcy of life as usual and challenge the status quo. This scripture in particular was revolutionary. The rich are going to suffer, the poor will finally get their fair share. In other words, everybody's going to get what they deserve.

And there's something else going on here...

LUKE 1.46–55:

Magnifies, from back to front

55—Abraham and Sarah and their descendants--exponential population growth

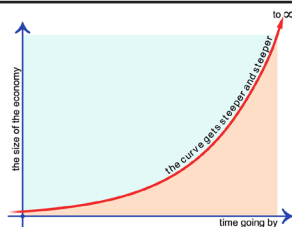
50—“mercy from generation to generation for those who stand in awe”

48—surely all generations will be blessed

But the real gem is this: *My soul magnifies the Lord*—what if our souls magnified the Lord?

EXAMPLE OF EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

Exponential simply means something that grows more and more rapidly. Not to give anyone math flashbacks, but we've probably all seen one of these charts.



Chess board example—There is an old story that reminds us of the surprise that we can get when small number like two is multiplied by itself many times. An Indian King India was so pleased when his grand vizier presented him with the game of chess. So he asked Ben dar to name his own reward. The request was so modest that the happy king immediately complied. What the grand vizier had asked was this. That one grain of wheat to be placed on the first square of the chessboard, two grains on the second square, four on the third, 16 on the fourth and so on. Doubling the amount of wheat for each square until all 64 squares would be covered.

When the King's steward had gotten to the 17th square the table was well covered. By the 26th square, the chamber had been filled. When 42 squares were accounted for the entire palace was swimming in rice. The king then asked his mathematician to figure what this would cost him. The amount required would've covered all of India to a depth of over 50 feet.

To put it another way laying this many grains of wheat end to end would have stretched from the earth beyond the sun across the galaxy and all the way to the star Alpha Centauri, four light years away. Then stretch back to earth. Then back to Alpha Centauri, and then—you guessed it—back to the earth again!

And this is generally the problem with exponential growth is that it usually has a crash. There is not enough wheat. The population outgrows the food supply, technology limitations cap advances. BUT, none of those things can put a cap on love.

4 Imagine love stretching to Alpha Centauri and back, then out and back again. Or, just spreading around the world, saturating every city and countryside.

But imagine if instead of it being the size of the economy on the y axis that is was love.

IN THIS SERIES...

What is God's Exponential Love? Where do we see it? How do we see it, both in life and in the Advent event?

Next week we are talking about how we receive God's love and what gets in the way. We have to receive it before we can spread it. What blocks us from receiving it? We'll talk more about that next week.

Week 3: How do we pass God's love along so that it does grow exponentially?

Week 4: How do we celebrate God's love? Joy!

Christmas eve...we're going to have a little Suessian fun.

WHERE DO WE SEE GOD'S EXPONENTIAL LOVE?

A puppy

A baby. Will Isaac be there?

Service

Living into that world that Mary sang of where all have enough and none too much

BENEDICTION

Next week we will take a look at what blocks us from receiving God's Love.

