***“****God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.**In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.**No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:9-12*

When I think about love during Advent, I think about Mary. She is an exemplar of love. I’ve always had deep admiration for Mary. Having become a mother myself, I am even deeper in awe of the task she undertook and her courageous act of faith, of mothering the Messiah.

Mary, a poor Jewish girl from an obscure village called Nazareth, was a virgin—pledged to be married. Suddenly, the angel of the Lord Gabriel miraculously appeared to her. He told her she was highly favored by God, and that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah. Surely, Mary was shocked—frightened even—when she heard this news. No matter how a woman finds out she’s conceiving or receiving a child, it comes as a great shock. Mary’s first words for Gabriel are a question: “How can this be?”

Then another miraculous event occurs: Mary consents. She says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Could Mary have said no? Gabriel announces that she will conceive, but it doesn’t happen until *after* Mary accepts. Karen Swallow Prior says, “With Mary's words of ‘let it be,’ we have what just might be the first recorded instance of verbal consent in human history. And considering the times—ancient Middle Eastern cultures were not known for their justice toward women—this verbal consent to being the bearer of the Christ child is quite remarkable indeed.”

Mary consented to love. The same Spirit that brooded over the waters of creation would brood over her and conceive the Christ child in her womb. And she agreed. She agreed to something unfathomable and unforeseen. Through her obedient act of love, Mary brought hope into the world. She labored for love. She believed, and it opened her to God’s immense call.

Imagine her telling Joseph and her family. Imagine the public ridicule and shame she underwent. She mothered the savior of the world for the sake of love, knowing what was as stake. She bore love incarnate, Christ Jesus, who would consent to the ultimate act of love: death on a cross.

We consent to God’s call because of God’s perfect love for us, and out of our love for Him. He is trustworthy, and Advent opens us up to what He is doing in our lives. God, grant us the courage to give of ourselves, to be exemplars of love. Grant us the strength to endure, the faith to believe.

May God’s love cause us, like Mary, to open up to acts of courageous love.