

## Love Is Born When Jesus Was Born

1 John 4:9-14

Dec. 24, 2024 (Christmas Eve-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

*We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:9-14 NIV84)*

In the name of the Christ-child, Jesus our Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

What a beautiful hymn we just sang! You may have recognized the melody as the tune of an old Christmas carol, "Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella," but the words are a modern Christmas hymn called "Love Has Come." In fact, the second verse makes the bold claim, "Love Is Born!" with Jesus' birth. This night, as we ponder the baby Jesus who was born of a virgin, placed in a manger, proclaimed and praised by angels, and worshiped by shepherds, let us see that **Love Is Born When Jesus Was Born.**

We first look at love's origin. Love didn't start with us. The old apostle John, writing over 90 years after Jesus was born and 60 years after he died, wrote, "This is love: not that we loved God..." No, God certainly didn't love us because of how we loved him! Look at the world around us. A week ago, a school shooting in a Christian school in Madison caused three deaths and multiple injuries. Civil war has erupted in Syria. Wars are ongoing between Russia and Ukraine, and in the Middle East. Here in America there's class warfare, culture wars, racial and political divisions, hate crimes—true love is hard to find. Nor do we find love originating in our hearts either. John wrote earlier in this letter, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9). "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:15).

No, true love—love that is selfless, that gives without any thought of getting something in return—that's not in us by nature. But that night when Jesus was born, we have to say with John, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world....This is love...that he sent his Son..." God sent him on a mission, not to condemn this world, but for the purpose of saving it. Even though we had lost that perfect image of God when Adam and Eve fell into sin, even though our hearts are only inclined toward evil, hatred and self-centeredness, God decided, "I am sending my own Son to these people. I'm doing it not because they deserve it. I'm doing it simply because I love them."

At Christmas, parents give gifts to their babies and little children. They don't do this because their little ones had given them something first. They give because of their love for them. So God gave us Jesus, not because we loved him, but because he loves us. Love's origin is found in God the Father in the giving of his Son!

When the eternal Son of God became flesh, a human being, we also witness love's working, its effectiveness. Hear the apostle go on: "...that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Earlier in this letter John wrote what that sacrifice needed to entail: "The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin" (1:7). To save us, the Son needed to be flesh

and blood. So the eternal Son of God was conceived and born in time; the almighty Lord now became a strengthless tiny baby; the all-knowing Word was made a baby that needed to grow in knowledge like any child; the omnipresent God is now in a local place, in a womb, in a manger, at a home and, eventually, on a cross. Oh, the extent of the Son's love to atone, to make the payment for all our sins!

And not just ours: "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." This gift, the Word made flesh, is a gift for everyone, for all people! Yes, God's heart is that big, that he would give his Son up and save all people, all over the world! This love is truly born, then, when Jesus was born: Jesus was and is true flesh to make the payment for fellow human beings; Jesus was and is true God to make that payment count, with his holiness and power over death.

John also tells us the goal and result of this love. God "sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." Without Jesus we would not have spiritual or eternal life; we would die forever in our sins. But because Jesus came and lived among us, we now will live for him. Thanks to Jesus we will not die forever, instead we get to live as God's children, for God has now adopted us into his family through baptism; we are not doomed to hell, but we are heirs of eternal life, heirs of an eternal kingdom in heaven.

Love is born when Jesus was born, so that we live and love. John reminds us, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Love begets love. When we receive a present that totally thrills us, don't we respond by thanking and loving that person? So we will love our Lord God back. But how? "No one has ever seen God," John writes, "but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." Or to put it another way, "love reaches its goal in us." God loved us and saved us so that we can change our sinful, hateful ways and show our love to him by loving one another. Let the love of Christ move you to drive hatred out and instill love, selfless love, toward others.

Yet another gift of God's love that enables us to love is this: "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the one who comes from the Father and the Son when we come to faith, at baptism, through the power of God's Word. So we can also say that love is born in us when the Spirit comes to us. We continue in love because the Holy Spirit is at work in us with his fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23a). The Spirit brings us God's love and enables us to love God and one another back.

It had been more than 60 years since John saw Jesus teach and preach and do miracles, and how Jesus suffered, died, rose and then ascended. But as long as he lived, John told his readers, he would "testify" what he had seen, that "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." Now that love is born, and that love has changed our lives, let's also testify this love to others, what Christmas is all about: It's all about love. When Jesus was born, love is born indeed! Amen.