Sermon Series: The Wonder of Christmas
Sermon Title: Christmas Love

Text: 1 John 4:7-12 -- Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Introduction: Once there was a little eight-year-old boy named Nathan who was kind of self-centered and lacked any real compassion for others. No matter how his parents tried to change him, nothing seemed to work. With Christmas coming soon, Nathan wrote his "**Dear Santa**" letter, and much to his parent's dismay, it was a request, twelve pages long, of gadgets and toys all for himself. When they saw the letter, his mother and father were very concerned. The father picked up his young son and carried him to the living room, setting him firmly on the floor in front of the family's nativity scene. "***I want you to sit right here and look at this until you remember what Christmas is all about. Then you must write a letter to Jesus instead of Santa***." So Nathan sat there a while and then found a pencil and paper and began to write. "***Dear Jesus, if you will bring me all the presents I want, I will be good for a whole year***." After a few moments, he realized that was an impossibility and so he tried again. "***Dear Jesus, if you will bring me all the presents I want, I will be good for a whole week***." Once again, after reflecting for a short time, Nathan tore up the letter. He sat still thinking as hard as he could about the content of the letter for several minutes. Then it hit him. He knew what to do! Gently, Nathan reached down and picked up the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus. He carried her off to his room and placed the figure in a shoe box under his bed. Then, he returned to the living room, pulled out some more paper, and began to write one more letter: "***Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again…***" Sometimes Christmas seems to bring out the worst in people, doesn't it? Yet it shouldn't be this way, as we all know. The fact that Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of the Son of God should cause us to reflect a great deal on the topic of love and the multitude of ways that it weaves itself back and forth in the story of the birth of Christ. This morning I want to take some time

and share with you **three of these ways** so that as we celebrate Christmas tomorrow, our hearts will be filled with love for God and people, just as they ought to be.

Background: Before we begin to look at our passage, allow me to provide a little context for you. Here in **1 John 4:7-12**, John the Apostle, in the words of **William Tyndale**, '***sings his old song again***.' The love of Christ so penetrated John's life as he followed his Lord that it made a profound and lasting impression on him. **Four times in the gospel he authored**, John referred to himself as the one "***whom Jesus loved*** (**See John 13:23; 20:3; 21:7, 20**)." Obviously, he wasn't arguing that he was the only one to experience Christ's love. Rather, of all the attributes that defined our Lord, the one that touched John most was His unconditional love. In this short letter, the apostle has already mentioned it twice (**See 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18**). As if it can never be emphasized enough, John shares some more about his favorite topic in these six verses from the fourth chapter. Now let's take a closer look at what he says and how it applies to Christmas.

Christmas REVEALS love (**1 John 4:7-8 -- Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love**). Why does Christmas reveal love? Because it reveals God. Christmas is nothing short of the revelation of God to humanity in the person of Christ (**See John 1:1, 14**). The child in the manger is Immanuel (God with us—**See Isaiah 7:14**). He is Almighty God (**See Isaiah 9:6**). He is God over all (**Romans 9:5 -- To the Jews belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen**). If we're going to have a discussion about love we must do it in the context of a discussion about God, according to John, because God and love are inseparable. Here's what it says.

- **God is the source of love**. Love comes from God. There is, according to the Scriptures, no other place that it can be found. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the godhead (**See Galatians 5:22**), meaning that it is the inevitable consequence when anyone walks with God (**See Romans 5:5**). It is God who teaches us to love (**1 Thessalonians 4:9 -- for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another**). John is so certain of this that he can say, "**Whoever does not love does not know God…**" Or to say it positively as he does in **verse eight**, "**Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**."

The idea is that to experience love we must go to the one from whom it springs forth like water from a well. There is, in fact, no other place to find it.

- **God is in His very essence love**. The New Testament makes several claims of God. **(1)** He is spirit (**See John 4:24**); **(2)** He is a consuming fire (**See Hebrews 12:29**); **(3)** He is light (**See 1 John 1:5**). In the case of Paul's writing here in **1 John**, false teachers had infiltrated the church at large (**See 1 John 4:1**), and were beginning to teach early forms of Gnosticism (God could not have come in the flesh because everything in the material world is evil—**See 1 John 4:2-3**). They would have agreed that God is spirit (immaterial) and light, but they would never have referred to Him as love because that is felt in the physical world. Yet, it is so descriptive of the nature of God that it is mentioned twice in this chapter (**See 1 John 4:16**). John wants us to know that all of God's activities are performed in love, whether creating, sustaining, or judging. He is love and so cannot do anything unloving.

  As we all know Christmas has been very secularized. I have been to programs that tried to present Christmas from many different perspectives (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, etc). It was amazing to me that at one of them when it came to presenting our point of view, the name of Jesus was never mentioned. Listen. We cannot fully celebrate Christmas unless we celebrate Christ. ***Christmas is not so much about us loving one another as it is first and foremost about God loving us through His Son***! It reveals something about the very essence and nature of love that can only be seen in its fullest expression in God Himself. (**Review: God Reveals Love**)

Christmas DEFINES love (**1 John 4:9-10 -- In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins**). I looked up the definitions for 'love' found in the dictionary and here's a survey of what I found: **(1)** a profoundly tender, passionate affection; **(2)** a feeling of warm personal attachment; **(3)** sexual desire or gratification; **(4)** in tennis, a score of zero. ***Admittedly, it's pretty hard to define love***. The Bible gives us the best understanding of it. If I could be so presumptuous as to sum up what the Scriptures say about this divine attribute in one statement it would be: ***Love is self-sacrifice for the good of others***. For God to love us in this way meant that He would have to do something almost unimaginable on our behalf. He would

send His Son into the world to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When it comes to gifts, Jesus is called the indescribable gift in **2 Corinthians 9:15**. Now taking Christ as our example we can say that gifts are loving to the degree that they meet four conditions:

- ***A gift must be given voluntarily***. God sent His Son, not because we were deserving, but of His own free will.
- ***A gift must be given with the right motive***. God sent His Son because He loves us.
- ***A gift must be something of value***. God sent His one and only Son. The same term is used of **Abraham's son Isaac in Hebrews 11:17** and the only son of the widow of Nain (**See Luke 7:12**). Jesus was and is the Son of God in the most absolute sense of the phrase. There is nothing of greater value that the Father could have given to us.
- **A gift must bring blessing to the one who receives it**. To those who receive Christ, we have the privilege of being called children of God (**See John 1:12**) as our sins are covered by the blood of Christ (**See Romans 4:7**). It isn't enough to wish for something good for others, love results in good for others. One pastor shares the story of a memorial gift that his church received not too long ago. There was a short note written on a beautiful little card that gave the name of the person in whose honor the gift was given. It said, "***Enclosed you will find a check in loving memory of…***" Unfortunately, the person who sent the card forgot to sign it and to enclose the check. To top it off, the card had been purchased from **the Alzheimer's Foundation**. Though the giver meant well, the gift was of no value.

Christmas INSPIRES love (**1 John 4:11-12 -- Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us**). The main theme of these six verses is "***love one another***." It occurs three times (**Verse 7, 11, 12**). The first is in the form of an EXHORTATION (i.e. a word of strong encouragement that looks to the future) -- "**let us love one another**." The second is a statement of OBLIGATION -- "***we ought to love one another***." The word "**ought**" actually means to "**be duty-bound**." In other words,
love for one another is a moral obligation that flows out of God's demonstration of love for us in the incarnation and ultimate crucifixion of Christ. The third is presented as a HYPOTHESIS, meaning an if/then statement…"***if we love one another***." The first part is the condition to be met. The second is the result. ***Those***

who love one another prove that God's love abides in them and is constantly being perfected (completed) in their experience (**See 2 Timothy 1:7**). It is IN OUR NATURE to love one another.

Three Christmas challenges:

- Spend a little time thinking about the love of God revealed in the birth of His Son.
- Examine your love for God and others. See if it measures up to the standard that you have been given.
- Find a way to share love with someone this Christmas simply because you can.

Conclusion: Author **Bret Harte** wrote a story called, "***The Luck of Roaring Camp?***" Roaring Camp was supposed to be, according to the story, the meanest, toughest mining town in all of the West. More murders, more thefts--it was a terrible place inhabited entirely by men, and one woman who tried to serve them all. **Her name was Cherokee Sal**. She died while giving birth to a baby. No one knew who the father was. Well, the men took the baby, and they put her in a box with some old rags under her. When they looked at her, they decided that didn't look right, so they sent one of the men eighty miles to buy a rosewood cradle. He brought it back, and they put the rags and the baby in the rosewood cradle. And the rags didn't look right there. So they sent another of their number to Sacramento, and he came back with some beautiful silk and lace blankets. And they put the baby, wrapped around with those blankets, in the rosewood cradle. It looked fine until someone happened to notice that the floor was so filthy. So these hardened, tough men got down on their hands and knees, and with their calloused and filthy hands they scrubbed that floor until it was very clean. Of course, what that did was to make the walls and the ceiling and the dirty windows without curtains look absolutely terrible. So they washed down the walls and the ceiling, and then someone thought to put curtains on the windows. After a short time things were beginning to look as they should. Of course, they had to give up their fighting, because the baby slept a lot, and babies can't sleep during a brawl. ***Soon the whole temperature of Roaring Camp seemed to go down***. They used to take her out and set her by the entrance to the mine in her rosewood cradle so they could see her when they came up. Then somebody noticed what a dirty place that was, so they planted flowers, and they made a very nice garden there. It looked quite beautiful. And they would bring her gifts, shiny little stones and things that they found in the mine, but when they would put their hands down next to hers, their

hands looked so dirty. Pretty soon the general store was all sold out of soap and shaving gear and perfume etc. *It seemed that the baby changed everything and Roaring Camp was much the better for it*. That's also the way it's meant to be with Christmas. The Christ-child born in a manger in Bethlehem enters into our lives, and then inspires us to change. We become kinder, more loving people as we order our lives to accommodate His presence.