

Sermon: Christmas Day

Text: 1 John 4:7-16 (vv.9, 13)

Theme: A gift of love

Goal: The gift of love we receive at Christmas from God, Jesus, is to be shared: We love as God loves us.

Dear Friends in the new born Christ,

Introduction: How many gifts did you receive for Christmas this year? Usually children receive more gifts than adults; as someone said: "The smaller the child, the bigger the gift; and, the bigger the guy, the smaller the box...." - What was the most precious one? Maybe it was not a material gift...perhaps just a special word, a kiss, a hug from someone who loves you...

Did you receive a gift from your enemy? No, enemies don't share gifts.

But God gave a gift to His enemies on the first Christmas. The Apostle Paul wrote: "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:10).

It was a gift of love, from God's heart to our heart, to bring us back to His fellowship. God doesn't like to have enemies. He wants everyone to become His child, part of His family and an heir of His Kingdom. The gift of God is renewed not only as we celebrate Christmas every year, but is available to everyone every day, every minute, and every second!

I – God gave His Son

Vv.9 and 10 of our text echoes John 3:16, 17. Let's read both texts: "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.” – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John

3:16, 17). - Christmas is not just a birthday celebration of a special child born in Bethlehem a long time ago. Christmas is a time to enjoy the gifts that the baby Jesus brought from God to us: life, forgiveness and salvation. The story of Christmas is not a simple story in itself. If so, it could be just a tale. But the Christmas story goes forward and has its climax on the cross, where the atonement was made, and on Easter Sunday, when the victory was proclaimed.

The baby is a very special baby: He is the Son of God, His one and only Son. This is the most precious gift God could have given to someone. Would you give your son or your daughter to someone? Of course we do it when we give our children in marriage. But then we give them to someone who loves our son/our daughter. Remember that God gave His one and only Son to His enemies!!! The goal of God was to touch the hearts of the enemies with this precious gift to bring them back to God as friends and children. Some didn't accept the precious gift and put Jesus to death. But others accepted Him as the Son of God and as their personal Saviour. God converted the bad in good: The death of Christ was accepted as a sacrifice for the sins of the enemies, and His resurrection was the proof that life was conquered and is available to all who accept and believe in Jesus.

John wrote: “He (Jesus) came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a

husband's will, but born of God.” (John 1:11-13). “Everyone who loves had been born of God and knows God.”

II – God gives His Spirit

The Christmas gift God gives us, Jesus, doesn't come alone. It has a special bonus, like “buy one, take two”; or better: “Take one and get three!” Our text says: “This is how we know that we live in him (in GOD) and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.” The Holy God Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, lives in us. The Holy Spirit is given to the believers in the Holy Baptism as a special personal gift to every one of us. He lives in us like in His own temple. Paul wrote: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Holy Spirit is strengthening in us: A) every time we read the Holy Scripture or listen to it; B) every time we remember our Baptism as we receive God's forgiveness in the Confession and Absolution; C) and every time we come to the Holy Communion to receive Jesus' body and blood for forgiveness of our sins. The Scripture and the Sacraments are called “Means of Grace” because through them the Holy Spirit is given in a rich measure and He strengthens our faith, our hope and our love. This is like a wheel in movement, generating life more and more. The circle cannot stop. Like a watermill, the stream of the Spirit cannot be blocked. He generates power in our life. If we don't allow the Spirit to flow in us by the Word and the Sacrament, the “Spirit mill” stops and we spiritually die.

III – We share God's love

How do we know and recognize that God lives in us? Our text says: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God... Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love... Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” The sign that God lives in us is that we love each other. The church is not a place of hate and discord. The church is not a place for fighting and quarrelling. The church is a place of love for each other, always asking ourselves: What can I do to please my brother / my sister in Christ? How can I show my love to others as God loves me? There is no room for selfishness and own interests.

Conclusion: The best image God uses to illustrate His love to us is a wedding: He is the bridegroom, the church is His bride. And we understand and feel it very well when we look to our own marriage. When you love someone, you give him/her the best you have. This does not only mean a new car, money, whatever; but it is your heart, your life. In our marriage, we gave each other totally, uniting our lives forever. And we enjoy our love in every single detail, day after day.

Christmas is the Feast of Love: The love of God for us, giving His one and only Son, and coming to abide in us (remember that Emmanuel means: God with us); and the love we share with each other, not just our partner and our children, but everyone God puts on our way: our Christian family (all of us); our fellows in our work or in our suburb; the needy. We cannot love by the force of the Law; it comes from the heart of God to our heart; and from our heart to the heart of our fellows. “We love because God first loved us.” In His love: Merry Christmas. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, 25 December 2013