

Christmas is so close, you can almost taste it. The anticipation is thick in the air and it has been practically from Halloween. Many of us have travel plans. Others have family coming into town. We have purchased and wrapped presents, and we can't wait for people to enjoy the gifts we have to give. Maybe we're looking forward to opening a few presents of our own.

We are wrapping up our Advent Sunday series as we explore the assigned epistles. We are discussing four of the Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. We've had the chance to discuss our waiting for Christ's coming with hope, peace, and joy, and now we'll talk about waiting with love.

Today we'll ask, "What do you love in this season?"

If we're honest, perhaps what many of us love during this season is the presents. Gift giving is certainly a key part of the holidays. We love to give gifts. We also love to receive gifts. How many of us can remember good gifts that we've received throughout our childhood?

Love is a powerful force. When we wait with love, that love can move mountains. The thing about which we need to be careful is how that love is directed. Love can be a powerful force for evil just as for good. Luther talks about this in his discussion of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods," He writes in the Large Catechism, "A "god" is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol."

Would it still be Christmas if there were no presents? Would it still be Christmas without the meal with all the special dishes? We get so anxious about these things, and we know they are good things in their proper place, but how often can we make idols of the picture perfect Hallmark Holiday?

We read in the book of Hebrews, "**Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure."** This text specifically is talking about how the Old Testament system of animal sacrifice has become obsolete with the Advent of Jesus.

Those lambs, bulls, goats, and birds slaughtered once showed God's people's love for Him. However, they no longer were relevant with the Advent of God's greatest gift of love to me and to you, namely, Jesus Christ.

Egg nogg and baked ham, the coolest toy or the most thoughtful present can all be wonderful things when given their proper context. But that's not what the babe in Bethlehem is looking for as we quickly approach the celebration of His birth in a few days. He doesn't want your sacrifices and offerings in an attempt to

make Christmas worthwhile. He wants you to ponder His sacrifice once for all. 3. The Father doesn't desire sacrifices and offerings, but His sacrifice.

What do you love in this season? Perhaps it's not the things as much as the people and the experiences. Perhaps this is the only time of the year you'll get to see a child or cousin. The time off from work allows for the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends that we wouldn't otherwise have.

I can relate to this, as the week between Christmas and New Year's is a special time for me and my family as I typically take a week of vacation to reunite with family and friends. It's a chance to recharge and reflect on the year that has gone by and look forward to another year of God's promises.

Whether we have it written down or not, all of us most likely have a list of things that we want to have happen between now and the end of the year. That's good for us to have aspirations and hopes. But would it still be Christmas if you weren't able to see family, to go to the movies, or engage in any other wholesome family traditions? What is your desire for the holidays? In other words, what is your will?

Rather than sacrifices and offerings, themselves, the Lord Jesus Christ came to do the Father's will. **“Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”** Jesus did the Father's will perfectly.

Consider the first Christmas. Mary and Joseph returned to Joseph's ancestral home, and there was no room for them in any of the lodging places of distant relatives. Riding on a donkey while in the third trimester hardly had to have been on Mary's to do list. Giving birth in a stable can't be the desire of any woman.

Jesus' life and ministry was hardly a cake walk as he wandered around with disciples with meager rations and no permanent place to lay His head. Yet Jesus did His Father's will. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane as He considered the suffering and pain He would endure, He prayed, “Yet not my will, but yours be done.”

It was certainly painful. Jesus' suffering and death is not anything that you or I would choose for ourselves. However, it was for the good of all humanity. So too, the Lord may have some odd things in store for you, and your desires might not be carried out in the next few weeks. However, it's always important to remember: 2. The Father doesn't desire to do our will, but His will.

What do you love in this season? I think all of us love Christmas music. Indeed, there are many good Christmas songs playing on the radio this time of year. Nonetheless, for every good song, there's at least one inappropriate one.

Perhaps this is a problem year-round, but our society often has a misguided idea of what love is. In many cases, love is equated with lust, and true love is traded for cheap romance.

This season, don't be fooled by love as gift giving, pleasant experiences, or romance. Instead, reflect on the nature of true love from Hebrews 10. We read in verse 10, **“And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”**

More than the perfect gift, more than seeing all your loved ones and having a wonderful time, more than your greatest romantic dreams being realized—**“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.”** Jesus was born so that He could be sacrificed. He is the perfect gift. He is the loved one who longs to see you. He shows you true love.

What a wonderful gift, to have every sin forgiven. To be sanctified and made completely holy in the eye of the Father because of Jesus' loving sacrifice for me and for you!

There is no Christmas without the Christ child, and there is no hope, peace, joy, or love without this child growing up to do all that He did for me and for you. He obeyed the Father's will perfectly for you. He sacrificed Himself to pay for your sins. He smashes your idols and redirects your love to proper things. He forgives you for where you have fallen short in previous Christmases, and He is empowering you to have the best Christmas yet.

If the devil were to take away our gifts, our family, and our rest and relaxation in this time of the year, it would still be Christmas because the love of Christ defeats Satan's hatred and envy. It could still be the best Christmas yet because Jesus still remains there for you.

And so Christmas is only a few days, but we wait with love. We wait with love because we have been filled with the love of the Christ child who is not simply a cute baby, but my savior and yours. Likely, many of us will have presents, family, and good experiences, but we can see these as of secondary importance to the surpassing love of Christ which fills us in this season as He was the ultimate sacrifice for sins. We can show that love to others. 1. The Father doesn't desire false love, but the love of Jesus.

**BECAUSE THE SON LOVED US BY SACRIFICING HIMSELF  
ACCORDING TO THE FATHER'S WILL, WE WAIT FOR CHRISTMAS  
LOVING OTHERS. Amen!**