BIBLE BAPTIST CHURCH OF ERIE
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"FINDING LOVE IN OUR DIFFERENCES"

Series #2

REDISCOVERING CHRISTMAS: GOOD NEWS IN TROUBLING TIMES

LUKE 2:1-7

Last Sunday we were challenged to hold on to hope when it's hard to cope. Now please remember that the biblical word for **HOPE** is based on God's **PROMISES**. Hope means I bring my problems to the Lord as I hold on to the specific promises of God. To hope means to wrap my problems together with God's promises. And a good definition for HOPE is: **"Hope is wishing for what God has already promised us**." Now our topic today is, "**Finding Love in our Differences**." Behind all BBC or Erie giving is love. Love leads to giving because love is a verb and Christmas is all about giving. We read in **2 Cor. 9:15** where Paul said, "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*"

Here's our main idea: God's love gives life to others. Let's examine **Luke 2:1-7** and answer the **how**, **where** and **what** questions about the love of God. We'll conclude with **John 3:16** in order to answer **WHY** God did what He did at Christmas.

1. **The HOW**: God used a pagan ruler to get Jesus to Bethlehem. God moved in the heart of a pagan Roman emperor, who lived 1500 miles from Israel, to declare a census for the entire world.
2. **The WHERE**: Jesus had to be born in **Bethlehem** to fulfill Scripture. Listen to **Micah 5:2.** Notice how precisely God orchestrated everything that first Christmas. In His sovereign love, God made sure they were in the right place at just the right time, to fulfill the Scriptures.
3. **The WHAT**: Christianity is an historical faith. Our faith is based on fact, not fable or fiction. We know precisely when Jesus was born because we're introduced to historical characters and events. **Let's unpack verse 7.**
   ⇒**An ordinary birth**
   ⇒**A firstborn son**
   ⇒**Wrapped in swaddling cloths**
   ⇒**Placed in a manger**
   ⇒**No Room in the Inn**

4. The WHY:

In order to better understand who Christ is and **why** the Father sent Him to earth, turn to **John 3:16**. Here we will see how God's love gives life to others.

John 3:16 is the ultimate verse and the theme of the entire Bible. What we learn from this majestic verse is about:

1) **The Ultimate Declaration**. The word "**for**" introduces a cause or clause (no, not Santa) and links this verse to what comes before. For "**God**." This ultimate declaration begins with God. This is precisely where the Bible begins. The little word "**so**" shows us God doesn't love a little, but a lot. The volume of His love is cranked up high. The word "**love**" is *agape*, which refers to an unconditional covenant kind of love, and it's a verb, meaning it's a word of action. Notice how God loves the whole "**world**." This would have been a shock to Jewish listeners who thought God loved only them.
2) **The Ultimate Demonstration**. The word "**gave**" has the idea of sacrifice. The phrase **"His only begotten Son"** is very significant. Jesus is the "unique, one and only" Son.
3) **Ultimate Decision**. Aren't you glad the word, "**whoever**" is in this verse? God loves the whole world, which means everyone, and He offers salvation to whoever, which means you! To "**believe**" means to, "trust in, rely on and lean into." The offer is **universal**, but the application is **exclusive** – salvation is only through Jesus Christ and is only activated for those who believe and receive Him.
4) **Ultimate Deliverance**. To "*perish*" means to be eternally separated from God. The word "**but**" shows a contrast - we don't have to perish but instead can have "eternal life." Let's ponder what **verse 17.** Listen to **John 3:18.** This verse teaches two stunning truths.
   • If you believe in Christ, you will not be condemned
   • If you don't believe, you're condemned already
   The word "**have**" means, "to have and hold, to have in your hands," implying continued possession.

God declares His love and demonstrates His love by the giving of His Son. When you decide to receive His gift to you, you will be delivered. God's love gives life to others.