

Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

Sermon December 24th, 2019

The Christmas Story Isn't All Flash: Seeing God's Christmas Miracle in Our Everyday Experiences

The Christmas story we hear this evening from Luke's gospel, and the Christmas experience we live out from November 12th till December 25th here in Canada seem very different from one another, don't they? For one, our contemporary Christmas experience is quite flashy. For example, there is so much commercialism where we are bombarded with commercials that try to convince us to buy the latest expensive technological gadgets (I see the Best Buy commercial at least fifty times a day). Or jewelry with the most bling. Or toys that do everything from cry to poop. Actually, a few years ago one of the most popular toys on a child's Christmas list was the poopin' Max. A dog named Max that you could feed and then watch as Max pooped it out. Kind of funny if you ask me. I have to admit we were suckered in from that commercial and own a poopin' Max. Easier to clean up after then a real dog.

Another example that comes to mind is when we turn back the clock to some of the famous Christmas specials in the 70s and 80s. Garfield's dream at the beginning of Garfield's Christmas special says it all when the first thing he asks for from the Christmas present machine is bright shiny Jewels.

Then there are all the decked-out Christmas parties, malls, city parks, homes which most of us find so beautiful as we drive or walk by. Lights of many different colors. Tinsel. Garland. Mistletoe. Some neighborhoods and townships even have Christmas light contests. I think of a Charlie Brown's Christmas where Snoopy enters the Christmas light contest and decks out his dog house with all these decorations and lights. And then hearing Charlie's priceless response "Oh no My own Dog gone commercial. I can't stand it."

Or in the Simpson's first Christmas special Homer works hard to put up all the lights just to find out that only four bulbs are still working. How many of us have forgotten to test the lights before hanging them up? Homer still tries to keep face by asking Bart and Lisa two of his children "what do you think kids?" "Nice try Dad" they respond.

Meanwhile, Ned Flanders, Homer's next-door neighbor has also just finished putting up his lights and decorations and asks Homer if his house looks good enough. The lights are shining brightly all over the house. There is a Santa with two elves saying "Ho! Ho! Ho!" There are lawn ornaments all over the yard. Homer's jealous response is "It's too bright. That Flanders. Stupid Show Off." While Bart and Lisa say "Oh! Neato!"

Most of us put up a Christmas tree with shiny ornaments, lots of lights, glitter, tinsel, and either a bright star or an angel. We decorate our houses from top to bottom with nativities and maybe a Santa Clause or two. Turning back to Charlie Brown's Christmas I think of how angry everyone became when Charlie Brown brought back the barely alive tree instead of a big shiny aluminum tree he could have picked out. Then there is the awe of John Arbuckle and his family after Garfield puts the finishing touches on their Christmas tree.

Now, I don't know about you, but I love a lot of the flash that comes with Christmas. I could do away with some of the commercialism, but the bright lights, shiny ornaments, and other decor lifts our spirits up during these darker colder days. I believe there is a place for the flashiness of Christmas. Even in our Christmas story this evening there is a moment of flash as angels sing to shepherds about the arrival of the messiah.

So, don't go home tonight and take all your Christmas decorations down or return that new smart phone or tablet or video game or diamond bracelet or life like toy you will probably receive tomorrow. Spoiler alert.

This has become part of our contemporary Christmas story, and to demonize it or ignore it doesn't do justice to the joy the Christmas story brings into our lives. As long as this flashiness doesn't become all what Christmas is about. I find that what is important for us to remember is to appreciate everything about Christmas. Not just the flash, but also the simple. The bareness of Christmas.

Our traditional Christmas story that we heard this evening outside of a momentary flash of angels singing is simple and bare. Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem to participate in a census. Now I'm sure the journey wasn't easy, especially for Mary who had to ride on a donkey at nine months pregnant. But, nothing flashy about this part of the story. Then Mary goes into labor and the only place they can find is a stable out back of a hotel. So, Jesus, the messiah, the future king, is born in a trough or manger around animals. In the middle of no where. Then the first guests to visit the royal family are not other royalty but shepherds. People at the bottom of the status poll. So, the traditional Christmas story is an ordinary experience with not much flash.

And this is okay too, because though Christmas has become flashy and focuses our attention more so on the angels singing than the stable these days. The Christmas story also challenges us to see that God's loving action touches our lives in the ordinary. Or in other words, God's love is present in our lives every day.

Sometimes it is harder to see, because we are more attracted to the flash, the ambience. Sometimes, when we focus too much on the flash we miss out on all the subtle ways that God touches our lives, whether it is through the love and support of family and friends, or the rest and recuperation we get during the Christmas season, or

the inspiration we get from a story, or the comfort we feel from a song or the longing we get to help someone in need as we ponder the Christmas spirit within us, or the peace we find in a moment of prayerful reflection or the hope we get from a baby lying in a manger.

God comes into our lives in the ordinary. Or in other words, Gods' miracles happen in our everyday experiences, not just in the extraordinary events in our lives. In a Charlie Brown's Christmas his friends realize the specialness of the Charlie Brown Christmas tree. It is simple, but reflects the Christmas story beautifully. And in this simple tree his friends are able to see something redeemable in it.

For Homer he finds out later that he didn't need money for all these Christmas presents or have flashy lights on his house. Creating a home for a dog that was rejected by his owner is enough to bring joy to his family at Christmas.

For Garfield, being with family, and getting a back scratcher that Odie made out of old gardening tools brought him Christmas joy. He didn't need his dream Christmas present machine that shoots out jewels.

For us, we see salvation. We see God's promises come alive for us in a baby lying in a manger in the middle of no where.

It is nice to hear the angels singing. And it is nice to know that God is walking with us and loving us in the ordinary everyday experiences of our lives. That the Christmas story of hope, love, and promise that we hear this evening is a story that touches our hearts everyday, not just on December 24th.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for all that the Christmas story brings to our lives. For the moments where we hear the angels singing. For the moments where the flashy lights and ornaments lift us up out of the darkness. For the moments where we stand with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the animals in the manger in awe at Your presence in the baby Jesus. For the moments where our time with friends and family bring joy to our lives. For the moments where we see Your love touching our lives in the ordinariness of life. **Amen.**