

## CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – Favorite Xmas Song – Away in the Manger 277

### SERMON

Brothers & Sisters in Christ, Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's the most wonderful time, of the year! And I truly believe that because there are so many traditions that we celebrate and there are new ones created every year. Some of them fade into oblivion forever while there are others that we say, "Do you remember when we used to do...? Let's try that again this year!" And sometimes we try it and realize that maybe there was a reason that we quit doing it, like trying to go to every single family Christmas party on one day. But there are so many favorite traditions, aren't there? During our children's message, we talked about our favorite Christmas songs. We have our favorite Christmas foods. We also have our favorite Christmas movies. What are some of you favorite movies? Why?

The other night, we watched Scrooged. It's 30 years old now and the star is Bill Murray, who plays Frank Cross, who is a television executive who has his television station perform Charles Dickens story, "A Christmas Carol" live on Christmas Eve. Hundreds of people have to work on this production on Christmas Eve. The day before Christmas Eve, his old boss and mentor, who died 7 years ago, shows up and tells Frank that three ghosts are going to come visit him. Yup, that's right, the Ghost of Christmas past, who takes him back to 1955 and then to the late 60's and then early 70's. The Ghost of Christmas present and the Ghost of Christmas past also visit him. I'll stop right here. Do you know how this is going? Do you know how it ends? Yup, Frank has a change of heart. He's just like Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol." They took an old story and updated it. And they weren't the first ones to do it either. How many different versions of "A Christmas Carol" are out there? Quite a few.

We are now at a turning point in our bible readings for Sunday mornings. Up until now, we have been reading from the Old Testament. How many books are in the OT? 39. We are now moving in to the New Testament. And we are going to be reading from the Gospel of Matthew, for the most part. Did you pay attention to today's reading? What was it about? It was the Christmas story!

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins

If we continue on reading from Matthew, the next verse is, "In the time of King Herod after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise-men from the East came"... hold the phone! Where is the stable? Where are the shepherds? Where are the Angels in the highest? Where is the Christmas story?!?!?!?

Where are you Christmas? All of the stuff that we traditionally associate with the Christmas story actually comes from Luke. Neither Mark nor John even include any semblance of a Christmas story. It is fascinating to study the differences in each Gospel and it is a challenge to accept that they do not tell one coherent story, that each one emphasizes different parts of Jesus teaching and ministry. Remember, these are not eyewitness recordings. They are not instagramming and facebooking everything. They don't have cameras and they don't even have tape recorders or typewriters. In fact, it wasn't until 30 years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension that someone said, "Hey, this is great stuff, we better write it down!!" So we get the gospel of Mark. And then Matthew and Luke are written 10 years later. And then 30 years after that, the gospel of John is recorded. And each one has its own nuances and intricacies. And so we are going to look at Matthew, which was written for a very Jewish audience that had just witnessed the destruction of the Temple for the last time. Israel as a nation won't be an officially recognized country again until 1945. So these Jewish people are trying to figure out what's going on and where do they go from here. Matthew takes the approach of saying, "Do you know all that we stuff that we have been praying for and reading about in the scriptures (the parts that we know as the Old Testament)? All of that happened in Jesus. Here, I'm going to prove it to you. So throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we will here, "this happened to fulfill what the prophets had said..." or something like that. This Messiah that we have been waiting for? He was here and you know what, he is going to come back again!!! And here is the proof.

And so Matthew wasn't as concerned with this big birth story. He wanted to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the savior of the people and that he has a legitimate claim because through his father, he is a descendant of King David. Matthew does this long genealogy of Jesus, going all the way back to Abraham, and King David is in that line. If you noticed, Mary didn't say much, in fact, the story revolves around the step-dad, Joseph. The angel of God appears to him in a dream and tells him that God has gotten Mary pregnant. She has been faithful to Joseph, and that her child is God's son. We need your help. Take care of her and her son, your son. When he is born, call him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. The angel gives Joseph a powerful duty. Give him the name Jesus. You get to say his name. Basically, he gets to claim Jesus as his own.

Just like in the movie *Scrooged*, there's a deeper story to it that's told in a different way. So too it is with the New Testament and the Gospels. There is the core story, the story of Jesus and how he came to save the world and each Gospel tells it in a slightly different way. Sometimes, that requires us to do some more work, like in the case of Matthew, where we need to dig into the Jewish understanding of things. He writes to an audience that knows the whole story well and we don't, so it's up to us to get caught up. I will try my best to help us all out with that. Because I need that too. We all need a little Jesus.

Do you remember how *Scrooged* ends? Frank stands in front of the camera, live on network television and tells of the miraculous evening he has just had. And he is alive for the first time in years. He has that feeling, that nice warm fuzzy feeling. And it feels great. And he says that once we feel it, we want more of it. And if you just want it you can have. You just have to feel it hard enough. You just have to want it enough. And then you will get greedy and you will need it all the time. And you just have FEEL it. You just have to put a little love in your heart. You have to do it... You have to... You... it's all up to you.

No, it's not up to. We can't do it. It doesn't matter how much you feel it and want it. If you keep looking inside of yourself, you will come up empty. It is God is with us. It is Emmanuel. It is Jesus. Jesus gives us life. Jesus forgives us of our sins. Jesus is our strength. Jesus is the one who puts that love in our hearts. Which is good, because as much as I want to do that, it's too much work. It is too hard. But Jesus shows us the way. Jesus leads the way. We can come to him when we are happy and when we are in trouble. What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry. Everything to God in prayer. Amen.

Now let's open up our hymnals and sing, What A Friend We Have in Jesus.