

LUKE 2:1-20 AND ISAIAH 9:2-7

CHRISTMAS THEMED CARTOONS AND MOVIES ARE POPULAR WAYS PEOPLE CELEBRATE THE SEASON. I DARE SAY MANY OF US HAVE OUR FAVORITE ONES WE LIKE TO WATCH EVERY YEAR. HERE IS THE STORY OF ONE OF THESE.

THE 1960'S BROUGHT MANY CHANGES TO OUR SOCIETY, INCLUDING THE CREATION OF THE "PEANUTS" COMIC STRIP BY CHARLES SCHULTZ.

ONE DAY SHULTZ WAS APPROACHED BY THE CBS TELEVISION NETWORK WITH THE INVITATION FOR HIM TO CREATE AN ANIMATED CHRISTMAS SPECIAL FEATURING THE PEANUTS CHARACTERS.

HE AGREED AND TITLED HIS SCRIPT: "A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS".

THIS CHRISTMAS PROGRAM IS INDEED ONE OF THE WELL KNOWN CLASSICS. BUT WHAT MANY MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH IS THE FACT IT ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN.

WHEN SCHULTZ PRESENTED HIS SCRIPT TO THE STUDIO EXECUTIVES- THEY WERE DELIGHTED WITH MOST OF IT.

HIS IDEA OF HIGHLIGHTING THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHRISTMAS WAS WELL RECEIVED.

IN FACT THEY LOVED CHARLIE BROWN'S EXASPERATION WITH SNOOPY DECORATING HIS DOG HOUSE WITH LOTS OF CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.

CHARLIE BROWN'S SISTER SALLY'S REQUEST FOR SANTA TO "JUST SEND MONEY", GOT MANY CHUCKLES.

AND THEY THOUGHT LUCY'S INSTRUCTIONS TO CHARLIE BROWN TO GET AN ALUMINUM TREE, IN PINK IF POSSIBLE, FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD CHRISTMAS PAGEANT- WAS GREAT.

THEY ALSO LOVED CHARLIE BROWN'S CHOICE TO BUY A SCRAWNY LIVE TREE, ALONG WITH THE GROUP CALLING HIM A "BLOCKHEAD" FOR THAT DECISION.

BUT WHEN THEY READ THE CLIMAX OF THE PROGRAM, WHICH IS LINUS' RECITING THE CHRISTMAS STORY, WORD FOR WORD FROM LUKE 2 IN THE KING JAMES BIBLE, THEY SAID "NO WAY".

YES INDEED THE EXECUTIVES WERE CERTAIN THEY WOULD GET MANY PROTEST LETTERS AND BAD PRESS IF THEY ALLOWED THAT READING TO STAY.

HOWEVER CHARLES SCHULTZ WAS ADAMANT THAT IF THEY LEFT THE CHRISTMAS STORY, AS HE WROTE IT, OUT OF THE PROGRAM THERE WOULD BE NO PROGRAM.

RELUCTANTLY CBS GAVE IN AND BRACED THEMSELVES FOR AN ONSLAUGHT OF NEGATIVE LETTERS AND REVIEWS.

THEY IN FACT DID RECEIVED AN ABUNDANCE OF LETTERS, AND MANY STRONGLY WORDED REVIEWS- AND JUST ABOUT ALL OF THEM WERE POSITIVE.

THE PUBLIC LOVED THE PROGRAM, INCLUDING LINUS' SCRIPTURAL RECITATION. THUS T.V. HISTORY WAS MADE.

THE LESSON FOR US IS- THAT CHARLES SCHULTZ KNEW WHAT WE SOMETIMES FORGET- THE REAL STORY OF CHRISTMAS WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE KEPT SECRET.

INDEED, GOD SO DELIGHTED IN THE STORY OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND BIRTH THAT HE: SENT ANGELS AND A STAR TO ANNOUNCE IT, INSPIRED SHEPHERDS TO TELL IT.

AND GOD ALSO HELPED PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT BY GIVING A MESSAGE TO HIS PROPHETS, AS WE HEARD TONIGHT'S READING.

YES INDEED, WHILE ISAIAH, AND OTHER PROPHETS' WORDS RELATED ON ONE LEVEL TO THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THEY SPOKE, HIDDEN IN THE SAME WORDS ARE ALSO THE PROPHECY ABOUT JESUS, AND HIS COMING TO EARTH TO BE OUR SAVIOR.

THEOLOGIAN JOHN CALVIN WROTE IN HIS COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH ABOUT HOW JESUS IS THE PROMISED SON, WHO CAME TO BRING LIGHT TO OUR DARKNESS, AND TO RESTORE LIFE TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

HE ALSO WROTE THAT THE GIFT OF JESUS BEING GIVEN TO US IS- ONE OF THE CHIEF ARTICLES OF THE CHRISTIANS FAITH.

THIS IS THE CASE BECAUSE WRAPPED WITHIN THIS GIFT OF A CHILD, WHO IS NAMED JESUS, IS THE HOPE OF OUR SALVATION.

THOSE OF US FAMILIAR WITH THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HEAR IN THE WORDS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL AN ECHO OF ISAIAH'S MESSAGE.

JOHN 1:5 SAYS: "THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS DID NOT OVER COME IT."

THE IMAGERY OF LIGHT IN THE BIBLE IS OFTEN A METAPHOR FOR GOD'S SAVING ACTION. AND THIS IS CERTAINLY THE CASE WHEN WE THINK ABOUT JESUS.

THE LIGHT OF THE BABE BORN IN BETHLEHEM IS THE LIGHT OF HOPE AND LIFE, OF GOD'S PROMISED PEACE FOR ALL PEOPLE.

AND EVERY TIME SOMEONE RECEIVES JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR, TO THAT PERSON ONCE MORE- A CHILD IS BORN AND SON IS GIVEN, A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.

FURTHERMORE, THE NAMES MENTIONED IN ISAIAH 9, CARRY A SPECIAL MEANING FOR OUR TIMES, AND NOT JUST FOR ISRAEL'S HISTORY.

LET'S LISTEN AGAIN TO THOSE SPECIAL DESCRIPTIONS OF WHO JESUS IS- AND WHY HE CAME TO EARTH:

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR SAVIOR ARE: WONDERFUL, COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, AND PRINCE OF PEACE.

JESUS IS INDEED WONDERFUL- HIS WONDER IS FOUND IN HIS VERY BEING AS GOD WITH US, SENT TO LIVE AS ONE OF US.

HE BECOMES THE COUNSELOR TO THOSE WHO WILL LISTEN TO HIS VOICE-LEADING US, TO HIMSELF AS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

THE ONE WHOM ISAIAH PROCLAIMS IS GIVEN TO US- IS NO ORDINARY ROYAL BABY, BUT IS OUR MIGHTY GOD-POWERFUL AND PURPOSEFUL.

HE IS THE ONE WHO HAS BECOME THE SHELTER AND REFUGE OF ALL WHO SEEK HIM IN THE GOOD TIMES, AND IN THE STORMS OF LIFE.

JESUS IS ALSO ETERNAL-FOR THE ONE WHOSE BIRTH WE CELEBRATE THIS NIGHT-EXISTED BEFORE TIME BEGAN.

HE DIED FOR OUR SINS AND ROSE AGAIN, ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND WILL RETURN.

HE IS FROM GOD THE FATHER, ONE WITH THE FATHER, AND JESUS SHOWS US THE KIND OF LOVE GOD HAS FOR THE WORLD.

HE IS ALSO THE ONE WHO HAS, BY HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION- MADE PEACE BETWEEN GOD AND US, AND GIFTED ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIM WITH ETERNAL LIFE.

THUS, THE REAL STORY OF CHRISTMAS IS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS- THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD- WHO IS GOD'S ULTIMATE SAVING ACTION IN THE WORLD.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES HE PROVIDES, AND THE POWER OF CHRIST'S GIFT OF SALVATION IS AVAILABLE EVERY HOUR OF EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR.

TRULY, THAT GIFT IS WHAT THE CHILD WHO WAS BORN FOR US, AND THE SON GIVEN TO US, BRINGS INTO EVERY HEART OPEN TO HIM.

HERE IS A STORY ABOUT MISSIONARIES WORKING IN THE 1990'S WITH ORPHANED AND ABANDONED CHILDREN IN RUSSIA.

THE MISSIONARIES WERE AT AN ORPHANAGE SHARING THE CHRISTMAS STORY WITH THE CHILDREN IN DECEMBER.

AFTER THEY FINISHED, THEY GAVE THE CHILDREN PAPER AND CRAYONS AND ASKED THEM TO DRAW THEIR OWN MANGER SCENES.

THE PICTURES WERE WONDERFUL TO SEE, HEART-WARMING AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT.

BUT ONE YOUNG BOY'S DRAWING WAS ALSO PUZZLING, BECAUSE HE HAD DRAWN TWO BABIES.

WHEN ASKED WHY- HE EXPLAINED THAT THE BABY JESUS LOOKED AT HIM AND ASKED HIM IF HE HAD A PLACE TO STAY.

HE SAID NO, BECAUSE HE HAD NO FAMILY, SO JESUS INVITED HIM TO STAY WITH HIM IN THE MANGER.

THE BOY ADDED HE AT FIRST SAID NO BECAUSE HE HAD NO GIFT FOR JESUS, EXCEPT HE COULD KEEP HIM WARM.

JESUS SAID THAT WOULD BE FINE WITH HIM, AND SO THE BOY DREW HIMSELF INTO THE PICTURE AS A PART OF JESUS' FAMILY.

IN THIS WAY THE BOY HAD SHOWN ON PAPER WHAT HE FELT IN HIS HEART, THAT JESUS LOVED HIM AND INVITED HIM TO BE HIS BROTHER, SO HE WOULD NO LONGER BE TRULY ALONE.

AND AFTER EXPLAINING HIS PICTURE THE CHILD BROKE DOWN AND WEPT OUT OF JOY.

HE EXPLAINED HE DID SO BECAUSE HE FOUND SOMEONE WHO WOULD LOVE HIM ALWAYS, AND WOULD NEVER ABUSE OR ABANDON HIM.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE ABOUT WHY JESUS IS NOT JUST THE REASON FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, HE IS THE REASON WE CAN BE FORGIVEN OF OUR SIN.

HE IS ALSO THE REASON WE CAN BE ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY, TO BECOME HIS BELOVED SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

INDEED, JESUS INVITES US ALL TO MAKE A PLACE FOR HIM IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES, AND HE PROMISES TO BE WITH US ALWAYS.

THUS WE ARE REMINDED, THAT WHILE OUR CHRISTMAS WORSHIP MAY ALWAYS HAVE MANY OF THE SAME SCRIPTURE READINGS, THE MESSAGE CAN STILL BE NEW.

THE NEWNESS OF THE MESSAGE IS FOUND IN HOW WE HEAR THE STORY A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY EACH YEAR, AS WELL AS WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR LIVES AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME.

AND SO MAY WE WELCOME CHRIST' PRESENCE AND HIS COUNSEL, PROTECTION, AND PEACE IN OUR LIVES, ONCE MORE.

LET US PRAY: GOOD AND GRACIOUS GOD, ON THIS HOLY NIGHT WE PRAY FOR THE CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD AS IT CELEBRATES THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

WE PRAY YOU WILL BESTOW YOUR WISDOM AND PEACE ON ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLES THIS NIGHT, THAT IT MAY BE A HOLY NIGHT THAT HONORS YOU.

GRANT RECONCILIATION TO THOSE SURROUNDED WITH CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE, THAT THEY MAY LIVE IN THE PEACE OF THIS HOLY NIGHT.

BE WITH THOSE WHO ARE TRAVELING THAT THEY MIGHT REACH THEIR DESTINATION IN SAFETY. AND WITH THOSE WHO PROTECT AND GIVE AID TO THOSE IN NEED OF HELP.

WE PRAY FOR ALL WHO ARE COLD, HUNGRY, OR ALONE THIS NIGHT, THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE THE GIFT THEY NEED MOST.

EMBRACE WITH YOUR TENDER CARE ALL WHO WANDER ALONE, OR HAVE NO PLACE TO LAY THEIR HEAD. MAY THEY EXPERIENCE THE HOPE OF THIS HOLY NIGHT.

BE WITH ALL WHO ARE ANXIOUS, DEPRESSED, OR ILL. DRAW NEAR TO THOSE IN THIS SEASON WHO EXPERIENCE PAIN OR GRIEF, OR SUFFERING IN ANY WAY, THAT THEY MAY FEEL THE COMFORT OF THIS HOLY NIGHT.

BLESS OUR CELEBRATIONS WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS THAT WE MIGHT SHARE CHRIST'S LOVE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THE MIDST OF OUR ACTIVITIES.

LORD, HELP US TO BE BOLD ENOUGH AND HUMBLE ENOUGH TO CLIMB INTO THE MANGER WITH JESUS TONIGHT.

AND EVEN AFTER CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY ARE OVER- BE OUR WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, LEAD US TO SEEK YOUR COUNSEL DAILY.

BE OUR MIGHTY GOD, OPEN OUR EYES TO YOUR HOLY MIGHT PRESENT IN THE WORLD, WITHIN AND AMONG YOUR PEOPLE.

O EVERLASTING FATHER, REMIND US THAT WE ARE YOUR CHILDREN-BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN A FAMILY OF BELIEVERS. TEACH US TO LIVE IN LOVE.

O PRINCE OF PEACE, MAKE US PRACTITIONERS OF PEACE IN THE WORLD. LIVE IN US AND SHINE YOUR LIGHT THROUGH US.

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS, WHOSE BIRTH WE REMEMBER AND CELEBRATE, WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY- LUKE 2:1-20 AND ISAIAH 9:2-7

THE REAL STORY OF CHRISTMAS WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE KEPT SECRET. GOD SO DELIGHTED IN THE STORY OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND BIRTH THAT HE: SENT ANGELS AND A STAR TO ANNOUNCE IT, INSPIRED SHEPHERDS TO TELL IT.

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