

November 28, 2021

Rev. Gina Hendrickson

INTRO to REEL Christmas Series & Message ~ ELF: Finding Joy

Today we begin a new preaching series called the REEL Christmas story, where every Sunday and on Christmas Eve we're going to look into the greatest story ever told about the coming birth of the Savior of the world.

Each week we will explore classic and modern stories as told from the big screen: ELF, It's a Wonderful Life, Scrooge from A Christmas Carol, How the Grinch Stole Christmas and A Charlie Brown Christmas. We're going to look at these classics through the lens of faith and see how Christ speaks to us through our pop culture.

There is no denying that the popular music, books, television, movies and social media have much to say about the world in which we live. Rev. Matt Rawley, UM pastor and author of acclaimed book series "The Pop in Culture Series" says it well: "I truly believe we are called not to reject the culture we live in, but to **re-narrate** its meaning—to tell God's story in the midst of it." Two small groups will be using 2 of his books this Advent—all are welcome!

I have permission to share an amazing conversation I had with member Kerry Sweezy after church, once the Movie posters went up in the hallway. She told me how much she loved the series, And that The Charlie Brown Christmas is her all-time favorite holiday movie. I asked why and she said, that as a little girl reading the comics with her dad and watching her favorite cartoon characters The Peanuts, was just the best.

Then she shared that Linus' spotlight moment in the Christmas special When he quotes Lk 2 of the birth of Jesus, just opened her up to really hear the Scripture in a new way. She said, "I went to SS, but the Word came alive for me—It was like BANG...it all connected."

This is what Pastor Jess and I hope will happen for each of us again and again as we explore these movies and Scripture throughout Advent. So lets open our eyes, ears and hearts to the spiritual truths that come from unexpected places.

Let us welcome again one of our guests from ELF the Musical, who will share special music before our Scripture reading.

SONG

Sparklejollytwinklejingley

SCRIPTURE IN THREE VOICES

Luke 1:30-32; 39-55

9am: Jim, Tricia & Pastor Jess

11am: John, Robin & Pastor Jess

Jim/John: The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.”

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,

Tricia/Robin:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Jim/John: And Mary sang,

Pastor Jess:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Thanks for a powerful reading of the Gospel!

Just like Kerry has her favorite Christmas movie that warms her heart,
I bet many of you do as well! So do I...and its ELF!

I love the story of how a baby orphan becomes adopted by a loving Elf Who never had a family, and goes on a journey to find his own family story And build new relationships.

It's a wonderful, hilarious journey of all the ups and downs
that come when finding one's way in life.

I believe the Movie ELF is all about finding JOY, from the North Pole to NYC,
There is joy in the journey!

I love the main character Buddy the Elf because he simply radiates joy. Buddy is a 6ft 3in tall human walking around in Green elf attire, yellow tights and pointy shoes.



While Buddy fully embodies the Elf culture in which he was raised,
He also has known that he doesn't quite fit in and is different.

Finally being told that he is human and adopted, Buddy goes off to the far-away,
magical land called New York City to find his biological father.

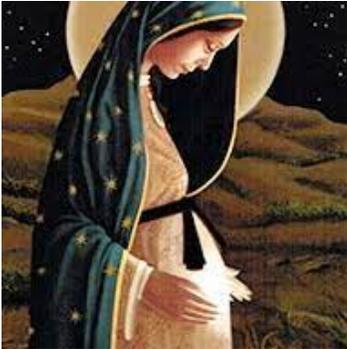
While in New York Buddy has a lot of reasons to be discouraged.

- His "On Santa's naughty list" of a father rejects his joyful nature,
- He learns that gum stuck to the subway rails is not free candy,
- That the mall Santa is an imposter, and
- That a lot of New Yorkers were not filled with Christmas cheer.

In the midst of not fitting into the elf world & being rejected by his biological father, Buddy has a lot of reasons not to be joyful... Yet he continues to be filled with joy & to let his joy radiate in such a powerful way that even the worst curmudgeons are transformed to joyful beings.

Buddy doesn't wait until everything is right or perfect, he has joy along the journey.

As I was prayerfully reading our Gospel lesson in preparation for today,
I realized that Mary is a faithful woman who also lived joy along the journey.



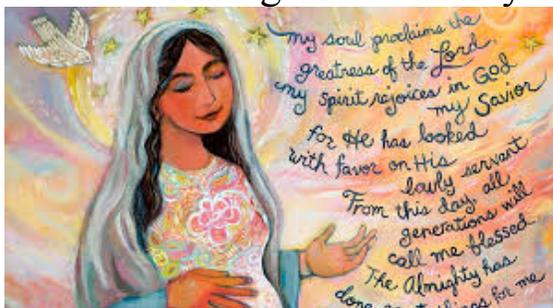
When Mary said yes to being the mother of Jesus, things were not perfect for her.
She was at risk of losing her fiancé, her family, Being judged by her community,
Being exiled and Potentially even being stoned for infidelity.

When Mary said she would be the mother of Jesus,
she did not know how everything would turn out.

- She was not all powerful and all knowing.
- She did not know that Jesus would teach love and forgiveness,
- That he would perform miracles and
- Be God's perfect love embodied on earth.

When she said yes to bearing Christ, she did not know the ways he would suffer,
die & then have victory over death & reveal Gods' power in the resurrection.

Without knowing how the story would end, she is so filled **with joy**.



that she bursts into song and joyfully sings of how amazing and good God really is.

Mary does not wait until everything is right or perfect,
she has joy along the journey.

The two main characters in our stories today from ELF and the Gospel of Luke—
Buddy and Mary—reveal the gift of finding joy amidst life in this crazy
world!

This morning as we begin our journey through Advent,
I want to look at the wonderfully inspiring “Code of Elves”
to help guide us in 3 ways of finding joy along the journey:

**THE CODE OF
THE ELVES**
**1. TREAT EVERY
DAY LIKE
CHRISTMAS**
**2. THERE'S ROOM FOR
EVERYONE
ON THE NICE LIST**
**3. THE BEST WAY
TO SPREAD CHRISTMAS
CHEER IS SINGING
LOUD
FOR ALL TO HEAR**

1. Treat Every Day Like Christmas
2. There's Room for Everyone on the Nice List
3. The Best Way to Spread Christmas Cheer is Singing Loud for All to Hear

We find JOY if we **Treat Every Day Like Christmas**

Buddy has this incredible sense of wonder and excitement in everything he does,
Everywhere he goes and with everyone he meets.

Whether its spinning doors, or taking in the sights of NYC; Dancing in the
mailroom,

or decorating a department store to become Santa's workshop—

Buddy finds absolute joy in every experience.

One of my favorite quotes from Buddy, besides “Son of a Nutcracker!”
is “I like to smile. Smiling is my favorite!”

It doesn't seem to matter what others do to Buddy, he's always smiling.

He's insulted and ridiculed, tossed out of stores, even put in jail—
and yet he never loses his joy.

We celebrate Advent and Christmas each year in our church to remind us of this
“Good News that brings great joy to all people.”

Christmas isn't just a one day event...its why we celebrate Christmastide leading to
Epiphany in our church seasons.

Christmas is an **everyday** gift, as the Savior of the World is born again and again
Into a hurting and needy world...

And born anew into our hearts and lives.

Oh friends we find joy if we treat everyday like Christmas!

The Code of Elves also reminds us **There's Room for Everyone on the Nice List**

One of the characteristics that makes Buddy so loveable, is his heart of
encouragement. If he thinks something positive (which is pretty much all the time),
he says it without reservation. Buddy is constantly blessing others with words of
joy & hope to everyone he meets, even those who ridicule him, even Cotton-
Headed Ninny-Muggins!

We learn Buddy's biological Dad is on the “Naughty List” for a variety of reasons-
Including his cantankerous disposition, overall lack of Christmas Spirit,
Unethical business practices and disconnect with both his sons.

And yet...Buddy helps his Dad find joy again—being redeemed by Christmas love
By the end of the movie.

We see his Dad's transformed life in how he engages in loving relationships
with his sons and changes in his work ethic and practices.

There's Room for Everyone of the Nice List—“Do not be afraid; for see I am
bringing you good news of great joy for ALL people: To you is born this day in the
City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” *Luke 2:10-11*

My siblings in Christ—This is Good News of Great JOY for US...

ALL have access to this gift. ALL have potential.

ALL need our encouragement. ALL are worthy of time and effort.

ALL are welcome. ALL are beloved ones of God...

Even Cotton-Headed Ninny-Muggins!

Finally, we find joy when we—

Spread Christmas Cheer by Singing Loud for All to Hear

I think it fair to say that most folk love singing Christmas songs and carols—

Loudly—even if off key—for all to hear!

I was just shopping at Boscov's this week and grooving to the holiday tunes they're playing. Then It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" came up...

by Andy Williams...classic right?

I was just filled with joy hearing that Christmas song,

so sang it aloud for all my fellow shoppers to hear. No fear. No shame.

I simply lifted my voice to make a joyful sound...my joy could not be contained.

And this is exactly what happened to Mary I think.



Remember amidst a time of incredible uncertainty,

pregnant with the Son of the Most High—

without knowing how the story would end,

she is so filled with JOY that she bursts into song—Her Magnificat—

and with a joy that cannot be contained, sings,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

She sings of how amazing and strong and just and full of mercy our God truly is.

Mary gives witness to Christ's coming alive into a hurting and needy world. Her song helps us today find joy again.

Joy bursts forth when we spread Christmas cheer by singing loud for all to hear.

So church, I know we all have those joyless worries in our lives

- It can be hard to find joy amidst this insufferable pandemic
- Or while facing the holiday season without a loved one

But today we are challenged ...

*Will we live joyfully along the journey before us this season?

*Will we experience joy, true joy, right here and right now
no matter what circumstances we face?



In these 27 days leading up to the birth of the Savior of the world,
~Let's remember to Treat Every day Like Christmas.

Look for the wonder and excitement coming alive all around you!

Find joy in every experience: from worship to the Messiah Sing;

From your favorite Christmas movie to decorating your house with lights;

From smiling at everyone to placing mittens on our church tree.

Finding joy comes when we treat every day like Christmas!

~Remember that there's room for everyone on the Nice List!

All can be redeemed by Christmas Love—

the gift of Christ being born within our hearts.

All have access. All have potential. All are worthy of time & effort.

So who can you and I share this gift of hope and encouragement with?

How can we claim a heart of encouragement this Advent?

~Finally let us remember that the best way to spread Christmas Cheer
is singing loud for all to hear!

Each of our lives has struggles and are far from perfect—

But when we still share the Joy of the Lord with others,

We are spreading Christmas Cheer because we are letting our lives SING!

We sing of God's glory and goodness with our voices, our actions, our love
Poured out to a hurting and needy world!

Finding Joy along the journey isn't so hard my friends...

May we find it...and then SPREAD it to all whom we meet! Amen & amen!