

Christmas Everyday

Slide: The Man who invented...

Last weekend I happened upon a movie while scrolling through Amazon Prime called "The Man who Invented Christmas", and took a chance on it. It was a movie about the story of Charles Dickens and how he came to write that short novella we all know and love "A Christmas Carol". In my Scrooge fashion, I threw a pillow at the TV yelling, "Dickens didn't invent Christmas! God did!" Ok, so it was a really sweet, corny movie, so I recommend it, but I was relating a bit to the old Ebenezer, thinking that this time of year was too busy and too stressful to enjoy Christmas. Humbug!

And yet, there is that classic part of Dicken's story that always tugs on my heart when Scrooge says, "I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all year." But, what would keeping Christmas all year long even look like? All that shopping, baking, parties, not to mention all the work, gift giving and stress, why would I want to do that all year long? And then I remember that Christmas isn't about those things.

Keeping Christmas in the heart all year round is something else entirely.

Slide: Nativity

The Word of God that spoke the universe into being now cries from a baby's lungs. The breath that swept across the dark waters, that separated the day from the night, that breath now blows softly on a young mother's cheek, affirming her great joy, settling her rising fears, heaven and earth, past and present, healing and hope, they dance together in Mary's poor and awkward arms. Christmas, now that's the message I wish to live every day.

And, you know, I notice how this changes people. This time of year, despite all the hectic schedules, people seem just a bit nicer, they give more to charities, and they remember what's really important in life. At workplaces, work seems to stop until the New Year. You can't accomplish any new thing during this time of year. Don't even think of it. Everything stops just for a short time, and even if just for a moment, we receive that feeling of, something that can't be described as other than Christmas.

Slide: WWI Wilhelm Troops

In December 1914, one hundred years and a little bit over ago, World War I was only four months into the running, but already it had become the War to end all Wars, dark and bloody as any war could be. On France's Western Front, soldiers of Kaiser Wilhelm II and George V faced off with one another from rows of frozen trenches. The cold winter rains were present in France, and there was no relief from the endless layers and layers of mud along with constant sniper fire.

*On Christmas Eve 1914, Scottish troops looked out across what was called No Man's Land, that space between the two foes, and noticed lights in the German trenches. In the evening twilight, they made out the silhouettes of Christmas trees with candles lit upon them. Laughter drifted across the troops. The lights of those Christmas Trees, known to the Germans as Tannenbaums, burned brighter, and pretty soon the Scottish troops heard a rich baritone voice begin to sing: "Stille Nacht, Helige Nacht." Silent Night, Holy Night."

Slide: Silent Night

"Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm; all is bright - round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.

Peering into the darkness of No Man's Land, the ground littered with German and Allied dead, seeing the lights of the Christmas Trees, and hearing that lone voice, one Scotsman said was noted historically to say:

Slide: "it was strange"

"It was strange, like being in another world, to which we had come through a nightmare, a world finer than the one left behind."

That Christmas Eve in 1914, in the midst of all that power and warfare, the sounds of a world bent on destroying itself, there appeared an unexpected gift, the gift of song, the gift of tenderness, the gift of peace on earth breaking forth into the dark chaos.

Slide: Silent Night...

"Silent Night, Holy Night, shepherds quake at the sight. Glories stream from heaven afar. Heavenly hosts sing, "Alleluia".

Christ, the savior is born! Christ, the savior is born.

Slide: Man with tree

On Christmas Day, The Royal Flying Corp got into the Christmas spirit. A plane was sent up over the German lines and dropped a padded, brandy-steeled case of plum pudding behind the German trenches. The German troops seemed to appreciate this, so they sent up their own plane with a careful airdrop of a bottle of rum. The Allied soldiers really appreciated that.

After darkness settled across the lines that night, an ambitious Allied soldier took a Tannenbaum topped by a Star of Bethlehem, leapt out of his own trench, oblivious to the bullet that whizzed by his head, and took that bright light across the death of No Man's Land, and sprang into the German trenches, the glow of its light fell everywhere, all the shooting stopped, and soldiers on both sides gathered to celebrate Christmas, singing Silent Night.

Slide: Silent Night

"Silent Night, Holy Night, Son of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from your holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord at your birth! Jesus, Lord at your birth.

Slide: Allied and German Soldier

The Christmas Truce of 1914 spread up and down the Western Front and for several days the fighting and killing ceased. Soldiers traded tobacco and photographs; a football game was played together. All this comradery made it difficult for the troops to see each other as the enemies they were. In fact, so much interchange occurred across the lines that generals on both sides issued unequivocal directives forbidding the fraternization, exclaiming the following quote that: *"...it discouraged initiative and destroyed morale in the ranks."*

Slide: manger and star

Living Christmas every day, would it look like this? Would the charity of the season, the memory of Christmas past and the reminder that Christmas is about Christ cause us to be a little more at peace, a little less at war, and a

lot less about ourselves and our own selfish desires? Maybe it need not be a cornball, elusive, naïve wishful thinking idea. Maybe, but probably not; for, it turns out that the very purpose of the Word entering our lives as flesh, as God with us, as the one known as Immanuel, is because we cannot live with Christmas in our hearts year round. To do so would to forget or even deny that we humans have a true nature, a separation from God and from each other that needs a loving God enter into and deliver us from. For, we need a God close to us, to enter into our world, our lives, and to bring our salvation.

And so, God does. God concocted the most outrageous plan imaginable, to come down to our level and be one of us. God comes to a world overcome with darkness to be light as one of us. God comes to a world overrun by senseless noise to sing the melody of peace as one of us. God comes to your life and my life as a priceless gift, the only gift that is true and matters, to turn the world upside down, as one of us.

There are moments when we know this, times we feel it and see it, hear it and experience it; and

that's Christmas. We are called to live it every day even though we can't. Thank God that Christ can and does...in the space of all time, in the beginning and in the end, as the universe opened wide its spark of light, in the skin of a little baby, with us as Immanuel, and as the crucified and risen One, who shook even Hell and raises us from the dead.

This, yes this, is Christmas. Maybe tonight we can have a piece of it, just a sliver of the world as it intended to be as it came to us in the cry of a baby in the cold.

Amen.

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