

The Miracles of Christmas: The Message

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[0 : 00] Well, on each Sunday of the Advent season, we will recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us. Hope, love, joy, and peace.

And I want to tell you something interesting. As a still fairly new pastor, when you begin to read about Advent and what the colors mean and the orders and which word is which week and all of those things, every denomination is pretty much different.

Churches within denominations are different. So my apologies to you if my order of these this year is different than what you may be used to. It will be okay.

I promised you that. And there is intentionality behind this. I've been reading a lot. And so you will hear the four words that you expect to hear. But the order may be different.

And it will be okay. And there is thought behind it. So this morning, as we continue in this season of Advent, we're lighting our first candle, which represents hope. Our second candle is love.

[1 : 07] Today, like the shepherds, we watch for signs of the Messiah's birth. And we celebrate the good news that was proclaimed for all people.

Saying, as we read in the Gospel of Luke, Glory to God in the highest heaven. And on earth, peace on those to whom his favor rests.

We reflect on the wonder of the manger, which represents God's rescue mission to save us. To save us as his beloved children.

I want to begin this morning, our sermon this morning, with a couple of brief stories. J. Edgar Hoover, maybe you know the name.

He ran the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. No question about it, he was in charge. As a result, almost all of his subordinates were on the lookout for ways to impress their powerful boss.

[2 : 10] So a young FBI agent was put in charge of the FBI's supply department. And in an effort to cut some costs and impress his boss, he reduced the size of the office memo paper.

One of these new memo sheets soon ended up on Hoover's desk, the director of the FBI. Hoover took one look at it. If you know anything about him, he was an intense dude.

He took one look at it, determined that he didn't like the size of the margins on the paper, and quickly scribbled on the memo, Watch the borders.

Cast it aside. The memo was passed on through the office. For the next six weeks, it was nearly impossible to enter the United States from either Mexico or Canada.

Because the FBI were watching the borders. But why were the FBI watching the borders? Well, they thought they had received a very specific warning from their chief.

[3 : 24] But in fact, they hadn't. They had transformed an innocuous comment, something that was stationary related, into a solemn warning.

Another story. Professional golfer Tommy Bolt was playing in Los Angeles. And he had a caddy who had a reputation of being a bit of a talker.

So before they teed off, Bolt was a very specific kind of a guy. He said, Do not say a word to me. If I ask you something, you just answer yes or no.

That's it. So during their round of golf, Bolt found the ball next to a tree. Where he had to hit it under a branch, over a lake, and onto the green.

Difficult shot. He got down on his knees, looked through the trees, and sized it up. What do you think?

[4 : 23] He asked the caddy. Five iron? No, Mr. Bolt. The caddy said. What do you mean not a five iron? Bolt snorted. Just watch this shot.

Caddy rolled his eyes. No, no, Mr. Bolt. But Bolt hit it, and the ball stopped about two feet from the hole. It was beautiful. He turned to his caddy, handed him the five iron, and said, Now what do you

think about that?

You can talk now, by the way. Mr. Bolt, the caddy said, That wasn't your ball. The messages that we send, and how they're interpreted by others, can be important.

But the result of our attempts to get our message across, can sometimes differ from our intentions. Can't they? Have you ever said something to someone, and had them react, in totally the opposite way you expected, and then in shock and horror, you begin to, or maybe you don't, begin to analyze, What did I say?

How did I set them off? I'm that way. I begin to filter, right? I begin to self-analyze, and say, What did I say? I can't imagine. I have friends, who immediately will shut down, if they accidentally set someone off, because they just don't know what to do.

[5 : 44] They don't know how to respond. Have you ever considered the fact, that here on earth, we may get so busy, living our lives, and pursuing our own agendas, that we actually become, pretty much deaf, to God's voice?

We don't hear, what God is trying to tell us. If you've read the Bible at all, you can see, God trying to communicate, his message.

God seeking to communicate, his message, to his people. But so often, I think we can relate to this as well, we don't always get it. But do you also recognize, something amazing in that?

God, in his infinite, infinite, patience, and love for us, rather than giving up in frustration, can you imagine, thousands of years, of dealing with us, dealing with the fact, that we don't listen, or we listen and do something else, or we just don't get it?

Rather than giving up in frustration, God continues, to seek to reveal himself, to us in ways, that we can understand. He doesn't give up.

[6 : 59] He looks for ways, that will catch our attention, and hopefully in the process, catch our hearts as well. And then finally, God sent, that's not finally, as in the end of the sermon, by the way.

You were getting all excited. Finally, already? Yes! Finally, God sent his very own son, to communicate his message, didn't he? We recognize that, in a way, that we could better, understand it.

That, my friends, is the miracle, of Christmas. And that's the title, and theme, of our sermon this morning, the miracle, of the message.

This year, our Advent sermon series, is called, the miracles of Christmas, as you know. But it's not enough, to know about, the miracles of Christmas. We need to experience them.

We need to experience them, in our own hearts, and in our own lives. And as, as we, began last week, we're, we're using one of my favorite, Christmas movies, Miracle on 34th Street, to help us illustrate, and understand, some of this, some of the miracle, of Christmas.

[8 : 16] And there's one point, in the movie, where Chris Kringle, is sitting in the big, Santa chair, at Cole's department store, and he's welcoming children, to come and sit, on Santa's knee, and tell him, what they would like, for Christmas.

And he interacts, with a little girl, who has come, to the store, like other children, to see Santa Claus. And so you really, need to see this movie. I, I have friends who say, that's not a Christmas movie, Elf is a Christmas movie.

Yeah, okay. But there are classics, and there are, pseudo Christmas movies. And I do like, Elf by the way. But, you really need to see, Miracle on 34th Street.

And I will do my best, over the coming weeks, not to spoil it for you, if you haven't seen it. Or you don't know the story. But part of the plot, is that the daughter, of Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Walker, is the woman, who is responsible, for the marketing, for Cole's department store.

She plans, the big, Thanksgiving, Santa Claus parade. And why, Thanksgiving, Santa Claus? Because as you may know, the U.S. holiday season, smashes, Thanksgiving, and Christmas together, into one, huge, long celebration.

[9 : 33] So, Mrs. Walker, does not particularly, believe in Santa Claus. And so, by association, her daughter, doesn't really, as well. And she's little, she's about, eight.

But she's there, at the department store, visiting her mom. And she observes, Santa interacting, with this little girl, in a way, that she could understand.

It turns out, that this little girl, is deaf. And Kris Kringle, communicates with her, in a way that she's, able to understand. He uses, sign language.

He was able, to speak her language. Hebrews 1, verses 1 and 2, records the miracle, of the message of God.

It says, in the past, God spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets, at many times, and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us, by his son, whom he appointed, heir of all things, and through whom, he made the universe.

[10:42] God sent Jesus, to communicate his message, in a way, that we can understand. The miracle, of the message, is that God, still speaks to us, today.

So that we can know him, and draw near to him. We can recognize, as we read the Bible, that throughout history, as I talked about, a bit a moment ago, God has been speaking, and acting, with the intent, of revealing himself, to his people.

He wants us, to know him. He wants us, to love him, to grow in relationship, with him, and to worship him. And God also, reveals himself, to us, through his creation.

Through the sunrise, and sunset. Through the sun, the moon, and the stars, the universe, and the sky around us. Through all living things, plants, and animals.

Throughout recorded history, God has been, communicating his message, to his people, in so many amazing ways. As we read in scripture, through visions, and dreams.

[12:02] Through angels, through symbols, natural events, many, many other means. And it's amazing, to recognize, that like God himself, God's revelation, is not limited, in any way.

It's not restricted, to a single place, a single time, or a single way, of getting his message, across. God's been speaking, throughout history, in a variety of places.

Through a variety of means, in order to make his will, known to us. I don't know, if you've ever learned this, but this is interesting. Before Jesus came, if you notice in scripture, before Jesus came, there had been, 400 years, of silence.

what does that mean? Well, since the prophet, Malachi, spoke, he spoke, his last prophecy, from God, there had been, no prophets, since then, until John, the Baptist, arrived.

And we all know, most of us, I hope, know, what John's message, was about, and who, John's message, John's message, was about. God's revelations, in the Old Testament, were somewhat fragmentary, somewhat occasional, and progressive, because no single, one of them, could contain, the whole truth, the big picture.

[13:37] The individual prophecies, could not adequately, capture, the full picture, of God's nature. God had been speaking, through these prophecies, but people weren't, getting the message.

They really didn't, fully understand, God's heart. They didn't understand, God's ultimate plan. And many people, over the course, of the Old Testament, as we read, were speaking for God.

But in some ways, they, misrepresented him. Not intentionally, but a lot of, early prophecies, would result in confusion.

Why? Because they were, parts of the whole. So God was, progressively, revealing his truth. Have you ever tried, to put together, a puzzle, without looking at the picture, on the cover of the box?

It's fun. In a not, very fun sort of way. But you may get a sense, like, think of it that way. You may get a sense, of what the picture is. Hopefully, you know to start, from the edges.

[14:48] But it can be confusing, right? You may be able, to get a sense, of the whole story. A sense of what, the bigger picture would be. But it's likely, still unclear. And that's a bit, what we're talking, a bit like, what we're talking about here, with individual prophecies.

Because they capture, part of God's message, but are unable, to really capture, the whole thing.

But then at last, God sent, his son, his only son, to bring the message, to us, directly, in person.

In the Lord, Jesus Christ, God revealed himself, directly, to us. Do you recognize that? It's absolutely true, that God revealed himself, through the words, spoken by Jesus.

Through Jesus' ministry, and through his message. But God also did, more than that, when he sent Jesus. Because Jesus Christ, is the living, divine, son of God.

Do you hear me say, is there, not was. Jesus did, more than proclaim, God's message, as other prophets, had done.

[16:09] Jesus, is, God's message. Jesus, came, to reveal, God. To make him, known to us, in ways, that we can, understand.

The writer, of Hebrews, goes on, to say, of Jesus, in chapter 1, verse 3, The sun, is the radiance, of God's glory, and the exact, representation, of his being.

Sustaining all things, by his powerful, word. After he had provided, purification, for sins, he sat down, at the right hand, of majesty, in heaven.

John's gospel, describes Jesus, as the word, becoming flesh, and living, among us. Do you want to know, what God is like?

Look, to Jesus. When Philip, asked Jesus, to show them, the father, Jesus replied, don't you know me, Philip?

[17 : 21] Even after, I've been among you, such a long time, anyone, who has seen me, has seen, the father.

Jesus also declares, in John 10, verse 30, I, and the father, are, one. The miracle, of the message, my friends, is that, not only the fact, that God speaks to us, today, through his son, but also, that this message, that God is communicating, to us, through Jesus, and in Jesus, has the power, to transform, our lives.

Christmas, is the celebration, of the greatest message, ever proclaimed, Emmanuel, God, with, us. God, came near, to us, through Jesus, so that, through him, we could, draw near, to God.

First, Timothy 2, verse 6, says, Jesus gave his life, as a ransom, for all, for all. The miracle, of the message, is that, in Christ, God, God is reconciling, the world, to himself.

[18 : 52] Jesus, came, so that, God, could reveal himself, and his plan, to us, in a way, that we could understand. Jesus, came, to proclaim, God's message, that we can be, set free, from sin's hold, on our lives.

But, why, would Jesus, give himself? Why, would he give his life? And, why, was that, part of God's plan?

Friends, God, acted, in this way, God, took this action, because, there was, no, other, way. And, because, he wanted us, to know, how dearly, and deeply, he loves us.

He wanted us, to know, that we've been created, for a reason, that we might know, God, and love him. Jesus, came, to proclaim, that message, that we have been, set free, and that we, no longer, have to be, prisoners, in sin, and regret.

This past year, some of you, may have heard, or received messages, that certainly, changed your life. Message from a doctor, telling you, test was positive, or using those words, it's cancer.

[20 : 26] Perhaps, a message from a teenager, saying, I'm pregnant. The message from a spouse, saying, I don't love you anymore, I, I want a divorce.

As a result, of messages, you have received, in your life, your life, has changed. Your circumstances, have changed, perhaps.

But in the midst, of it all, I want you to recognize, that there is, another message. God says to us, nothing, whatsoever, can ever, separate you, from my love.

God tells us, trust in me, with all your heart, and don't try to figure it out, on your own. Stay focused on me, and I will lead you, where you need to go.

That's a promise. In the midst, of life's betrayals, and bitter messages, God whispers, to us, forgive people, who treat you badly.

[21 : 37] In the midst, of life's messages, of joy, and celebration, God shouts, rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. The miracle, of Christmas friends, is the miracle, of the message.

It's simple. God loves, you, and me. Now, are you listening?

Believe the message, that God is telling you, and your life, will never, I promise you, never, be the same.