

*Christmas Eve*  
*December 24, 2023*  
*The Babe of Bethlehem*  
*Matthew 1:18-25*

Well, we have waited since Thanksgiving for this beautiful evening - the presents, the family gathering together, the decorations, the lights and of course the candlelight service tonight.

But I know many of you have been waiting much longer than that! And I call you the *Christmas in July crowd!* For those of you who do not understand what I mean by that, let me explain.

There are some people that love Christmas so much, they will brave the crowds of the Biltmore Lodge in North Carolina to see the beautiful Christmas decorations. Or they will drag their families into New York City to see the incredible Rockefeller Center. Or, as we witnessed it first hand in Korea for my family, they will travel from all over South Korea to Seoul to see the Christmas Miracle Mile with the amazing lights on the trees and department store windows with incredible Christmas dioramas in them.

While most of us would be happy to see the parade on TV, this crowd will brave the cold to be streetside when the floats go by. While most of us would be happy with patio fireplace s'mores, they will pilgrimage to the Gaylord Palms to see the Peanuts Christmas. While most of us will be happy to sleep in on Christmas day to do nothing but enjoy the extra day off from work, they will make sure everyone is dressed appropriately for their annual Christmas card picture and sit at the ornately decorated dining room table that only gets used once a year to eat the Christmas Goose, Honey Baked Ham, or Turducken!

And if they, by some tragedy of scheduling, can't have all the family present in December, by golly, this crowd will find another day in the year, even if it is July. They do everything, they can to have that celebratory feeling of Christmas right there and then with everyone.

Then there is the Christmas movie crowd. Whether you are the Hallmark movie fans, or the movies like: *Christmas Story*, *Elf*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Grinch*, *Christmas Vacation*, and of course the most famous and obviously Christmas movie of all time, "*DIE HARD*"! Whatever the family favorite is, I am sure you watch it every year together, because it just wouldn't be Christmas without said movie.

Just a couple of weeks ago I was laughing about the 1983 epic “A Christmas Story” with Pastor Moore. As I was thinking about the great line, “You’ll shoot your eye out!”

Pastor Moore looked at me like I had lost my marbles, to which I asked him, “Haven’t you ever seen *A Christmas Story* with little Ralphie and his Red Rider BB gun?”

He replied curtly, “No...why would I want to do that?”

“Because” I shot back, “It’s a classic Christmas movie.” To which Pastor Moore, seemingly prepared for my standard defense of this endearing movie, said, “It’s not about Christmas!”

Immediately I was offended!!! Everyone loves those movies as well as a host of others I am sure he would say is not about Christmas either! And, I must admit, while he was abrasive, condescending, uppity, and all around rude to the spirit of Christmas, he’s not wrong.

Even though they talk about Santa Claus, angels, and giving, literally none of them are really about Christmas! With one solitary exception that I am aware of, although I am sure you will tell me about others that I am unaware of after worship. The exception is *The Charlie Brown Christmas* with Linus’ famous soliloquy in the end of the movie where he directly quotes Luke chapter 2:8-14 and promptly says, following it, “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

Thanks Charles Schulz, you nailed it!

Or, let’s be honest, thanks be to God, that His Gospel message of salvation for the world came through His Son Jesus; nailed it! Aaannd, He used the Apostle Matthew to speak that truth to us this evening of lights.

The first light, being revealed to Joseph who simply saw it for what it was and did what any reasonably good man would do. To be sure, he was wrong that Mary was unfaithful, she absolutely was not. For the Christ Child in her womb was placed there by the Holy Spirit not by another man that lay with her. But, Joseph in his ignorance was still willing to spare her the penalty of death for her *perceived* infidelity, for no woman that had a child before marriage was allowed to live. In fact, Deuteronomy 22:23-24 specifies that the penalty was stoning to death for said sin. Joseph compassionately, lovingly, and quietly set about to spare her that painful death. A symbol of the same love, compassion, and quiet way the baby in her womb would one day go to the cross for the sins of the whole world.

But before Joseph could go down the dark, pragmatic point of no return in divorce, the Angel of the Lord came and shed light on the truth of what happened to Mary. Joseph was told he would continue his betrothal and raise Jesus as His own, as steward for the Heavenly Father’s Son.

But more importantly, Joseph and the virgin Mary learned that what was begotten of the Father's love in Mary was His eternal and Divine Son, the long-promised Messiah that would redeem God's people. He was the eternal Savior from sin.

As the LSB perfectly summarizes this important truth, says, "Joseph serves as a model for believers. Before he knew the reason for his wife's pregnancy, he wanted to treat her justly but mercifully. However, when God's angel reveals the unique miracle of a virginal conception, Joseph believes, and he fulfills the responsibilities by marrying his betrothed and raising Jesus. Some people struggle to believe the virgin birth, but it takes no more faith for us to believe than it did for Joseph. In fact, we have the evidence of Joseph's testimony to help us. He saw and believed that God can do what He promises. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to believe that God can do anything good, and that Jesus is truly both God and man."

I know that most of us think the true meaning and purpose of Christmas is the food, family, generosity, and spirit of good will on earth today. The problem is, we see that dream shattered all too often and no amount of decorations, family gatherings, and generosity can cover the fact that so many never experience Christmas like that at all. Rather, many people experience the opposite of that, even on Christmas.

But Joseph and Mary show us today that it is the Holy Spirit that put Jesus in the world, which we celebrate tonight. It is the Holy Family, we remember, who were faithful in their duty to the Heavenly Father's Son. It is our Churches today that provide the real food for eternal living, that demonstrate the real generosity comes in the form of a baby that would, a short 33 years later, die for the sins of the world so no sinner that believed in His generosity to them would die.

This is the true meaning of Christmas Eve, this is the spirit of Christmas time, and this is the only peace the world can ever achieve, and already has, because we know and believe in the Babe of Bethlehem. AMEN

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