

At the Movies: Christmas Edition!
Week 4 – The Gift We Need
Luke 2:1-20

Merry Christmas! And for those of you who also celebrate a birthday around this time of year, I want you to know, Jesus feels your pain...(show *Just to Be Clear* picture)

Thanks for carving out some of your holiday to spend it with us. Special shout out to those of you who are here because someone made you be here. You are seen and valued and my Christmas gift to you is a short sermon. You won't have to listen to me for very long.

At our staff Christmas party a couple of weeks ago, we played a little game that I thought would be fun as we get started. I'll show you some emoji's and you have to guess the title of either the Christmas song or movie it's describing...(play Christmas Emoji game)

We're in week 4 of our series, At the Movies: Christmas Edition where we're using some of our favorite Christmas movies to retell the story of the birth of Jesus.

- Week 1: Christmas Vacation – Jesus meets us in the disappointment of our unmet expectation.
- Week 2: Charlie Brown Christmas – A single encounter with Jesus can rewrite our story.
- Week 3: Elf – Life doesn't have to be perfect to be joyful.

This week, we're using a classic that was released 40 years ago in 1983...(show picture) **A Christmas Story!** Now, show of hands, how many of you are like my wife and can't stand this movie? How many of you are like my friend, Jeremy Moore, who will have it on for 24 hours straight this weekend? You love it?

I don't know that there's a more polarizing Christmas movie. But, wherever you stand, you have to admit, there are some iconic scenes in this movie, right?!

- Ralphie's brother layered up so much that he's not able to put his arms down. They just bounce right back up. Anyone else's mom like that?
- The Leg Lamp, this "major prize" the dad wins that comes in a large, wooden crate marked "FRAGILE," so it must be Italian!
- Schwartz, bypassing etiquette and skipping right to the triple-dog-dare, causing Flick to get his tongue stuck to a metal pole. Shouting "Don't leave me. Come back!" as his friends run back to class.
- One of my favorite scenes. Ralphie opening up his present from Aunt Clara...(show clip)

Randy's laugh and "he looks like a deranged Easter bunny" gets me every single time!

Of course, Aunt Clara's bunny pajamas aren't what Ralphie wanted for Christmas. He had his heart set on a bb gun. And not just any bb gun. Ralphie wanted the Red Ryder Carbine Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle. All throughout the movie, he lays down subtle, and not-so-subtle clues, and of course all of the adults tell him what..."You'll shoot your eye out!"

Spoiler alert: Ralphie gets his bb gun and he does nearly shoot his eye out. But, despite his minor injury, the movie ends with Ralphie snuggling up in bed, holding his new, prized possession. And, at least for a moment, all is good and right in the world.

There are a lot of things to love about this movie, but I think its most endearing quality might be its nostalgia. You have an emotional connection with A Christmas Story because it reminds you of your own childhood.

- Whenever something broke in the house, your dad could weave a tapestry of obscenity that's still hanging over Lake Monroe today!
- You had your mouth washed out with soap for repeating some of those words.
- You did something stupid because a friend dared you to.
- You had enough and finally beat up the neighborhood bully.

Or maybe you're like me, and the nostalgia comes from how you experienced the movie growing up. Every time I watch it, I'm transported back in time to my childhood home. I'm sitting in the living room, listening to my mom snort-laugh at her favorite scenes. A Christmas Story takes me back to a moment. It takes me back to a room. And it reminds me of what really matters.

I think that's why I love this time of year so much. Year after year, things change. People change. Relationship statuses change. Maybe you've felt that this year. The world around you might feel a little darker and colder. Our lives are constantly changing, but **THE** Christmas story never does. It's a story that takes us back to a moment. Back to a room where the Savior of the world is born, surrounded by livestock and shepherds who came to worship the newborn King.

In a world that is filled with so much chaos and confusion, there is something **centering** about the Christmas story. It reminds us of what really matters. And so, today, I just want to focus our hearts and minds on the moment that changed everything for everyone...**(READ Luke 2:1-20)**

We can get so caught up with things in life that we lose sight of what really matters. The pain you're going through right now, the stressors keeping you up at night, all the ways your life has changed over the past year, it can all feel so overwhelming. But, there's nothing more important than this...**Jesus is God's gift of love to you.**

This Christmas, whether you get exactly what you've been hoping for, or you get a pair of pink bunny jammies, know that God has already graciously given you exactly what you need in Jesus. He has given you the gift of his mercy and grace.

The truth is, we have all wandered from God and gone our own way. We have felt the sting of our sin and we need someone to rescue us from the burden of guilt and shame that we carry. That's why Jesus was born. God sent him as a gift of love, and by his death and resurrection on the cross, Jesus made a way for us to be forgiven and set free when we put our faith in him.

No matter where you've been, or how far you've strayed, God loves you and he sent his Son to make a way for you to come back home to Him.

So, as you celebrate Christmas, may you remember that LOVE has arrived, JOY can fill our hearts, PEACE can be experienced, and HOPE can be ours, all because a baby was born to shine the light of God's love into the darkness of our world.

[Pray, thanking God for the gift of his love, given to us in Jesus.]

Response Time

Communion: Another centering practice that takes us back to a moment, to a room, when Jesus gave us a way to remember him...(explain why and how we do communion)

Prayer Team: If you'd like someone to pray for you.

Jesus is God's gift of love to you. Maybe today is the day you receive that gift. You open yourself to him and find the love, joy, peace, and hope you desire.

Candlelight Service

A Christmas Story ends with the "old man" and mom sitting on the couch together, enjoying the warm glow from the tree, watching the snow falling outside. It's a moment of peace and quiet in the midst of all the chaos and noise.

As we close out today, I think that's what this moment is for us. We're about ready to head out into the thick of the chaos and noise of the season, but before we do, let's just take one more moment of peace and quiet.

A moment, in a room, that reminds us that the light of the world has come.

The light of Jesus shines in us, driving out the darkness in our lives.

And the light of Jesus shines through us, driving out the darkness of our world and bringing peace on earth.