

## Christmas 2021 “A Charlie Brown Christmas”

Fr. Frank Schuster

This year in the midst of Advent and preparing for Christmas, in a rare free moment, I rediscovered the cartoon “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. You all remember that cartoon, don’t you? It is a classic. If you haven’t watch it yet this year, I recommend it with everything going on in our world today. You see, Charlie Brown is feeling depressed that Christmas is here, and he can’t seem to get into the spirit. He doesn’t know why Christmas is worth celebrating at all. Linus has no sympathy for him so Charlie decides to talk to Lucy about it because, as it turns out, she is local psychiatrist. In a rare moment in these cartoons where Lucy actually tries to lift Charlie’s spirits, for five cents of course, she puts Charlie in charge of the Christmas play (where she will naturally play the role of the Christmas Queen). However, when he is given the responsibility of picking out a Christmas tree, he can’t get even that right. Of all the trees, he picks a dying twig and the kids make fun of him.

There are two moments in that cartoon that touched me. The first was in response to Charlie Brown’s question, “Can anyone tell me what Christmas really means?” the lights go down and Linus reverently quotes the Gospel of Luke recalling the birth of Christ. That was moving and a very good reminder. The second moment in the cartoon that was touching was when after Charlie Brown thinks he accidentally killed the Christmas tree he bought, the kids come to lift Charlie’s spirits and decorate it for him, making it beautiful. The cartoon ends with everyone singing Hark the Harold Angels Sing. It is truly wonderful!

Now why would I mention this cartoon this Christmas? Although I hope it is true that many of us are having a merry Christmas, I think it is a fair to say that a number of us can feel a little like Charlie Brown this time of year, despite our best efforts. Whether it is a situation at home or a situation at work , our worries about Covid 19, or just something going on in the soul right now, sometimes we can just feel numb or just indifferent to the meaning of Christmas. We simply can’t feel it. I think the remedy for this is what the Church is proclaiming to us on this feast day.

[Vigil Mass] Isaiah proclaims in our first reading, “For Zion’s sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch.” In our Gospel reading, meanwhile, the Christmas story almost begins in tragedy by Joseph intending to divorce Mary quietly due to a pregnancy people would not know what to make of. An Angel of the Lord shined light into that dark moment by saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

[Mass During The Night] Isaiah proclaims in our first reading, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone...For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.” Our Gospel from Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary arrived Bethlehem for the census, however there was no room for them at the inn. So, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a shelter made for animals.

Luke tells us, “...there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.’” Angels then lit up the sky to celebrate the birth of our savior.

[Mass During the Day] Our Gospel from John proclaims, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Like Isaiah prophesied in the first reading, “Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD comforts his people, he redeems Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.”

\* My friends, somehow the Christmas story this year brings me back to that Charlie Brown Christmas tree because I think that dying twig can be a metaphor for so many situations some of us could be dealing with in our lives right now that scripture speaks to. Don't get me wrong. We have much to celebrate too this year. Let's never forget that. However, if there was a dying twig in your heart right now, consider what that would it be. Think about it. What is it in our hearts right now that desperately thirsts for water, that desperately hungers for grace and love, perhaps at home right now, at our workplace or in our world?

The Good News is Jesus can take anything that feels like a dying Christmas tree in our hearts right now and turn it into something life giving and beautiful. The Church community helps us do this by lifting our hearts in worship and I am so happy that you came to this Mass. We can also help others when we are not at church by acknowledging those who are truly struggling right now at home or in our community so to be a little more kinder, a little more generous, and a little more loving because life is a precious and fragile gift. Along those lines, we would also do well to give God thanks for the person we see in the mirror on Christmas morning because you are a Christmas gift too to the people around you. Never forget that.

You see, my friends, the Church is proclaiming to us on this feast day that Jesus is our savior. We don't celebrate a man who lived 2000 years ago because he was a nice guy. We celebrate Jesus' birth because when the world could not get any darker, God gave us his only Son to be our savior. This is only good news if we truly recognize that, at a basic level of our existence, that we sincerely need saving. If we don't recognize that we need saving, if we don't need Jesus as our savior, celebrating Christmas makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. This is why, when I am asked, what does Christmas mean? Christmas means this: God loves you. God desperately loves you. He loves you enough to give you his only Son. Believe it. What this also means is this, if having a "merry" Christmas is too high a bar to obtain this year, everyone of us can still have a truly blessed Christmas by welcoming Jesus into our hearts as our savior. Have you considered that on Christmas we are blessed to call God Emmanuel. It is a word that means "God is with us" and the name Jesus also has a special meaning that we should never forget. It is word that means literally, "God saves".