



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Nativity of Our Lord, Thursday, December 24th 2015

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. “

✠ In the name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Ghost. Amen ✠

The phrase “a Christmas miracle” has been part of the popular vernacular since well before I was a small boy. One need only look through our 20th century popular culture to see a constant theme of “the Christmas miracle.” In *It's a Wonderful Life* we see the two-fold miracle of the community rallying around George Bailey, and George realizing how well loved he is, and how important he is to the people who love him. We see Ebenezer Scrooge have a spiritual awakening of sorts, and turn from his hard-hearted and greedy ways to embrace generosity and gentleness. And in my favorite Christmas movie, we get to see Detective John McClane have the same unlikely thing happen to him two Christmas Eves in a row. The “Christmas miracle” is ever-present in children's Christmas movies as well; Charlie Brown finally finds solace in the fact that the Christmas spirit is alive and well despite commercialization. And who could forget the fact that The Grinch's heart grew three sizes that day?

Suffice it to say, the Christmas miracle is a wholly ingrained part of the season. Indeed, we continue to look for a Christmas miracle in our own lives this time of year. A family in financial need hopes the mortgage gets paid. A family in spiritual needs prays a loved one will turn to God during his trials. A family in medical need prays for a healing miracle for an ill family member.

So why do we hope so much more for miracles at Christmas, than say, Easter? Surely, a holiday where we celebrate Christ's victory over death might seem the more apropos time to expect miraculous things to happen. Why indeed?

As you may have heard preached from this pulpit before, a rather large portion of the narrative of The Bible can most easily be described as thousands upon thousands of years of “humans behaving badly.” One can barely crack open the first book of Moses without seeing our complete inability to follow even the simplest of instructions. God leaves His creation alone in the garden for five minutes, and essentially tells them “you can do practically whatever you might desire, you have dominion over this place, but you must not do this *one thing*.” Of course, we turn the page, and *surprise*...the humans are standing there, saying “we did the thing.” Not only that, we also see the first example of one of mankind's longest-running foibles, the passing of blame; Adam barely takes a breath before blaming Eve for the whole thing - “She did it! I'm innocent! It was her and that snake!”

In the second book of Moses, God gives His people a list of very simple, very fair commandments. The first of which makes it exceedingly clear that He alone is to be

worshipped...no exceptions; yet the Hebrews say “well, you seemed busy up there, so we made this golden calf, and it seems like a nice enough thing to worship, don’t you think?”

Certainly, we do see some striking examples of obedience to God - Abraham and Isaac on the mountain, Noah and the Ark. But the overarching theme is that human beings simply cannot be trusted to obey even the simplest and fairest of rules or guidelines for behaviour. So rather than leave us to wallow in the mess we created, God decided to give us a path up and out of the mess. God chose to walk amongst us; God chose *to become* one of us so that He could *redeem* us. God chose to send a Savior. And he used the prophets and the psalms to tell his people who that Saviour would be, so that there would be no mistaking Him.

Consider this - more than 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*”

And while that’s a striking thing to consider this Christmas Eve, it doesn’t even scratch the surface of the prophecies of the Messiah. For example, Micah 5:2 foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and of the Tribe of Judah:

These and ***one hundred*** other prophecies all gave God’s people a very, very defined set of guidelines of who the Messiah would be. And some of them seemed almost contradictory, although not one could be forgone for another. Yet Jesus was able to reconcile even these, as no other person in all of history before or since could do. Jesus was a Nazarene, yet due to the very specific timing of the census, He wound up being born in Bethlehem. Indeed, he was the legal heir of Abraham and David by virtue of His adoption by Joseph, while at the same time being a blood descendant of David and a member of the Tribe of Judah by His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. And as he was not Joseph’s biological son, he was able to simultaneously fulfill the need that the Messiah be of the royal line of Solomon, yet sidestep the curse that God put on Solomon’s bloodline back

in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. And if this sounds a bit heady, I would love to take this time opportunity to give a shameless plug for our Friday morning Bible study - spend a few weeks with us, and nothing will seem too heady any more!

The thing is, our focus on miracles this time of year isn’t because we’ve been conditioned by movies or folk tales or popular culture to expect them. Quite the contrary, the season of Advent and the season of Christmastide are inextricably wound up with the most profound miracles in the history of the human race. We are presented with the miracle of God’s forgiveness for a perpetually and habitually disobedient creation, and His desire for us to reconcile ourselves to him. We are presented with the miracle not only of Christ’s virgin birth, but of why it and how it happened in accordance with prophecy. Indeed, we are presented with the miracle that one man in all of history was able to fulfill the hundreds of prophecies of the Messiah. We are presented with the miracle of His ministry and the individual miracles He performed during that time, from the wedding at Cana to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. We are presented with the miracle of Christ’s victory over death and the grave, and the future miracle of his return.

I hope you get your Christmas miracle this year, whatever that may be. I hope your Christmas season is full of hope and joy and spiritual rest and reflection. And I hope you have enough down-time during the constant craziness of this season to sit and watch your favorite movie, and witness your favorite Christmas miracle on the couch with a snack and your favorite person.

But more than anything, I hope you remember that the greatest miracle in our history as a people is a miracle summed up most succinctly in John 3:16 - “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

AMEN