

Christmas Sermon 2022

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 25, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us for our Christmas Service. I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Whether you are here in person or joining online, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take notes as you desire. We have much to cover in a short space of time.

FYI – Please note that the children shall remain in service today (i.e., no Children’s Church and/or Nursery). Should your child find it difficult to enjoy the sermon, the downstairs Nursery and Community Room are open. Of course, I believe that our little ones are able to give the Lord God the best of their attention.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

This Sunday I will endeavor to keep my remarks rather simple and summary. I realize that it is Christmas and we all have plans for the afternoon. However, I can think of no better place and/or way to celebrate the Birth of Christ than with His people in both worship and the study of the Word. After all, Christmas is to be about Christ!

NOTE 1 – I open with the following. For many years I served alongside of Joe Shea in college campus ministry. Joe is still involved in campus missions, though he has also taken on a pastorate in recent years. I have always found Joe to be an intelligent, thoughtful man when it comes to matters of the faith. I recall one day that he shared the following insight with me...

QUOTE – “Jim, every great story—every story that resonates with the human heart or moves us—somehow reflects back to or connects with the Bible and the story of Scripture.” In other words, the stories that endure throughout the decades or centuries, each in their own unique way, point us to truth and—ultimately—to Christ.

NOTE 2 – Think of the stories that have been passed down through the ages. Think of the stories and figures that have shaped our world and those who live in it. Look deeply enough and you will see that they always touch upon some scriptural lesson that is both timeless and timely in nature. This is true even of popular Christmas films that abound in the holiday season. Thus said...

Q. How many of you have favorite Christmas movies and/or stories?

A. Have you considered how they point to the truth and story of Scripture?

KEY – Allow me to take some time to illustrate...

SLIDE

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Q1. How many of you recognize the characters on the screen?

Q2. How many recognize the films in which they are featured?

NOTE 1 – On this screen you see four popular figures from four enduring holiday movies: **a)** Ebenezer Scrooge (George C. Scott) from *A Christmas Carol*; **b)** George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) from *It's a Wonderful Life*; **c)** Rudolph from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*; and **d)** Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) from *Home Alone*.

NOTE 2 – I have watched each of these films time and again, and each has deep connection both to Christmas and to the precepts of Scripture! Don't believe me? Allow me to quickly touch upon the abiding lessons that these characters and films uniquely show forth (i.e., for those who are willing to prayerfully consider and look)...

SCROOGE – A CHRISTMAS CAROL

FYI – Every version of *A Christmas Carol* is based upon a novella penned by Charles Dickens of the same name. First published in London in 1843, *A Christmas Carol* recounts the story of Ebenezer Scrooge; a miserly man who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, and the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. After their visits, Scrooge is transformed into a kinder, gentler man.

Q1. Who has seen, read or experienced any version of *A Christmas Carol*?

Q2. What enduring lessons and scriptural principles are presented within?

NOTE 1 – We could speak at length to the danger of greed. Scrooge had forfeited much (e.g., a devoted fiancé; an adoring nephew; connection with the saintly Cratchits; the opportunity to do some good with his means; his eternal soul) because he loved money more than all else. His heart had but one god, and it was a golden one! Does the story of Scrooge not lead us to think upon tests like the following...

Luke 12:15 (NIV)

15 . . . [Christ] said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

Matthew 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Matthew 16:26a

26 "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

1 Timothy 6:9–10

9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

NOTE 2 – We could also speak at length to a host of other ageless lessons: **a)** the peril of pride; **b)** the need for humility; **c)** the place for charity and the showing forth of compassion; and **d)** the certainty of divine judgment in the hereafter. Yet, for the sake of time let us move along to the next character and story...

GEORGE BAILEY – IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE

FYI – *It’s a Wonderful Life* is a 1946 film based on the short story and booklet entitled *The Greatest Gift*, which Philip Van Doren Stern self-published in 1943 and loosely based on *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens). The film stars Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, a man who has given up on his personal dreams in order to help others, and whose thoughts of suicide on Christmas Eve bring about the intervention of his guardian angel, Clarence. Clarence shows George all the lives he had touched and what the world would be like if he never existed.

Q1. Who has seen this film?

Q2. What lessons are presented?

NOTE 1 – We could speak to the reality that helping others can, at times, be wearying. George had come to believe that his life of selfless sacrifice was all for naught, as he had nothing to show from his ongoing generosity. Of course, as he comes to discover, nothing could be further from the truth (i.e., with the film culminating with the true scope, scale and beauty of his impact)! Thus said, I am reminded of the following words from the apostle Paul. Consider the following passage...

Galatians 6:9

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

NOTE 2 – We could speak to the truth that we are deeply interconnected, with each person impacting another. As George comes to understand, the removal of his presence from the earth (i.e., as if he had never been born), yields disastrous unintended consequences, and the world was truly the worse for his absence. Consider the words of Clarence, George’s guardian angel, as he seeks to educate George re: matters of influence and legacy...

QUOTE – "Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. And when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"

KEY – This forces us to think on our impact. Is it a good one? Consider your legacy and the wake you leave behind.

Proverbs 21:21 (ESV)

21 Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.

NOTE 3 – We could also speak to the power of humble prayer. In one scene of the movie, a very broken George tearfully utters the following: “Dear Father in heaven. I am not a praying man, but if you’re up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way.” In truth, He is both heard and answered, and I am convinced that the ear of the Lord is still attuned to the prayer of the broken...

James 4:10 (NIV)

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

RUDOLPH – RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

FYI – Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer is a fictional character created by Robert L. May. His first appearance was in a 1939 booklet written by May and published by Montgomery Ward (i.e., department store). Rudolph is usually depicted as the ninth and youngest of Santa’s reindeer, using his luminous red nose to lead the reindeer team and guide Santa’s sleigh on Christmas Eve. Though he initially receives ridicule for his red nose as a fawn, the brightness of his nose is so powerful that it illuminates the team’s path through harsh winter weather.

Q1. Who has seen or experienced any version of this Christmas classic?

Q2. What enduring lessons or scriptural principles are presented within?

NOTE 1 – We could touch upon the need to treat those who are different than us with both kindness and respect. It was cruel for the reindeer to pick on and exclude Rudolph for a physical feature over which he had no control! It remains cruel to bully or ostracize people for the alleged sin of being different. This world would be a far better place if we made allowance for one another and followed Jesus’ teaching...

Matthew 7:12b

12 “. . . in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you . . .”

NOTE 2 – We could also touch upon the fact that we are one body comprised of differing people with varying capacities or abilities. Rather than mock those who are different, why not consider that they might play a vital role in the purpose of God (i.e., even if that purpose remains yet unforeseen). Rudolph’s nose seemed a silly thing until its ability to light the way was revealed in an hour of need!

Romans 12:3–6 (cf. 1 Cor. 12)

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

KEVIN MCCALLISTER – HOME ALONE

FYI 1 – As one critic humorously noted, *Home Alone* is “the story of a young boy, abandoned and forgotten by his heartless family and left to fend for himself against a pair of ruthless criminals determined to force their way into his home in order to exact violent revenge upon him.” From a certain point of view, *Home Alone* has all the trappings of a horror film! However, it is actually a warm-hearted, endearing story with the following synopsis...

FYI 2 – *Home Alone* is a 1990 American Christmas comedy film featuring Macauley Culkin as young Kevin McCallister, a “boy who defends his suburban Chicago home from burglars after his family accidentally leaves him behind on their vacation to Paris.” To be honest, this still does not sound like a comedy, but I promise it is!

Q1. Who has seen this movie?

Q2. What lessons are presented?

NOTE 1 – To begin, *Home Alone* embodies that cosmic-level spiritual law (Gal. 6:7b): “A man reaps what he sows.” Thieves Harry and Marv though their hijinks as the “Wet Bandits” would lead to easy money over the Christmas holiday, but their criminality only landed them in jail. Let them serve as a warning to all who would follow in their footsteps!

NOTE 2 – Moreover, *Home Alone* teaches us concerning the need to face our fears. Consider that throughout the film, young Kevin has two particular fears: **a)** that the boiler in the basement is some treacherous monster; and **b)** that the old man across the street is a danger. As young Kevin comes to learn, his fears were not based in reality, and his assessments of the boiler and his neighbor were way off! Let us be wary of fear and the tricks it plays upon hearts and minds...

Isaiah 41:10

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

NOTE 3 – Ultimately, *Home Alone* teaches us re: the value of family and connection. Though Kevin had long dreamed of being alone and apart from his kin, an extended period of isolation and adversity taught him that relationship was precious, worthwhile, and to be celebrated. This affirms biblical teaching...

Genesis 2:18a (Upon the Creation of Adam w/out Eve)

18 The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

9 Two are better than one,

because they have a good return for their labor:

10 If either of them falls down,

one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls

and has no one to help them up.

11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered,

two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

TRANSITIONS

NOTE 1 – It is amazing the lessons that come forth from these enduring stories and beyond. Next time that you enjoy a Christmas movie or consider any timeless stories within our culture, reflect upon the timely messages, themes and scriptural lessons they present. Such affect us far more than we may recognize!

NOTE 2 – Of course, you may be thinking to yourself: “What is wrong with Pastor? Why on earth is He talking about Christmas movies and not about the Christmas Story itself?” Great Q – I am glad you asked!

NOTE 3 – The truth is that the Christmas Story of Scripture (i.e., the Birth Narratives of Christ featured in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke) present to us enduring figures and abiding lessons worthy of reflection.

NOTE 4 – This morning, I would like to cover four characters and the timely lessons they offer in kind. **SLIDE**

MARY

Let us begin with young Mary, the mother of Christ. Though Mary appears only briefly in the pages of the Word, we cannot diminish the significance of her example and the lessons her life illustrates. Let us take a moment to consider that moment when Mary was first informed of her role in the grand story of Scripture...

Luke 1:26–38

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Q. What can we learn from the life of Mary herein?

NOTE 1 – We come to understand the place of humility and the nature of our role before God and among men. Please note the manner in which Mary viewed herself (v. 38, Emphasis Mine): “I am the Lord’s servant.” Mary recognized that her connection with God was not a relationship among equals. Rather, there was a hierarchy and structure in which God was at the top, with her being the subordinate. Her willingness to humble herself before God led to the Birth of Christ Jesus and the salvation of wayward humanity! What might yours achieve?

NOTE 2 – Moreover, young Mary serves as an aspirational example of faith to all who would call upon the Lord. When an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in the earlier segments of Luke 1 (re: the birth of John T.B.), this aged priest doubted in a spirit of disbelief. Yet, when news came to Mary that she would be with Child in the most miraculous of ways, she simply took the Lord at His Word! No argument, debate or disbelief. No rejection of the message or overthinking the matter. Just simple faith (v. 38): “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

NOTE 3 – It is worth noting that the faith and humility of Mary would come at great personal cost. When Mary said “YES” to the call of God, she was saying “YES” to a lifetime of shunning, gossip, ridicule, scorn, loss of friends, loss of credibility, potential loss of her betrothed and future husband, Joseph, etc. She was saying “YES” to many lonely months of pregnancy and a lifetime of whispers. Yet she was willing to trust God in the short term, believing for eventual vindication and elevation! Consider the words she sang in the latter portions of Luke 1...

Luke 1:46–49 (Emphasis Mine)

46 And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

JOSEPH

Let us continue with Joseph, betrothed to Mary and adoptive father of the Christ-Child. Though he appears, like Mary, only briefly in the pages of the Word, we must not diminish the significance of his example and the vital lessons his life illustrates. Let us take a moment to consider his response to the news of Mary’s pregnancy...

Q1. Men, how might you respond upon the hearing of such news?

Q2. How did Joseph, a godly man, respond to the news and call of God?

Matthew 1:18–25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [i.e., the Lord Saves], because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) [cf. Isa. 7:14]. 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Q. What can we learn from the life of Joseph herein?

NOTE 1 – We might learn the place of mercy and compassion! Consider what the Word states concerning his reaction to the news of this unplanned pregnancy (v. 19): “19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” Please note...

NOTE 2 – He did not want to bring shame and disgrace upon Mary by making a public spectacle of their divorce. He could have destroyed Mary’s reputation and chance of every knowing a happy, normal life if he chose to operate out of anger, bitterness or vengeance. In many ways, such a response would have been understandable (i.e., after all she had apparently cheated on him)! Yet he chose to operate in love, charity and compassion.

KEY – Next time you are looking to become the worst version of yourself consider righteous Joseph!

NOTE 3 – Moreover, we see in Joseph the need for obedience to the call of God. Note again what is written in Matthew 1:20–21, 24 (Emphasis Mine): “20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ 24 When Joseph woke up, **he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him** and took Mary home as his wife.”

NOTE 4 – Joseph was willing to deny Himself and serve the Lord (i.e., though it cost him much I am sure) with a spirit of immediacy! To what degree are we so responsive to the call and command of God, wherever it may lead? It is no surprise that God called such a man to raise His Son!

SHEPHERDS

Let us consider the following account which highlights the activities of the shepherds of the Nativity...

Luke 2:1, 3–18

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. . . .
3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Q. What can we glean from the example of the shepherds herein?

KEY – Please allow me to note two elements (i.e., albeit rather quickly)...

NOTE 1 – We see in these shepherds a hunger to encounter the Savior they had heard of! Once again, let us consider Luke 2:15: “15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’” Note...

NOTE 2 – When the religious leaders under Herod heard of the Birth of the King of the Jews or Christ, they expended no effort to find Him. They were content with their theological pursuits, devoid of any hunger for connection with the Lord (cf. Matt. 2). Yet when these simple shepherds heard the report of the Birth of the Savior, they left everything (i.e., even their most sacred duty of tending sheep), to seek their Lord and King!

Q1. To what degree are you genuinely hungry for the Lord?

Q2. In what way(s) has such passion evidenced itself in your life?

NOTE 3 – Moreover, we see in this text that these shepherds were among the first evangelists of and for Christ!

Luke 2:16–17 (Emphasis Mine)

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, **they spread the word** concerning what had been told them about this child,

Q. What was the first thing they did upon discovering Christ?

A. They sought to make Him known and spread news of His Coming!

Q. To what degree have we so diligently made Christ known in our spheres of influence?

THE CHRIST CHILD

The final figure I want to touch upon this AM is the Christ-Child Himself. After all, Christ is the centerpiece of the Christmas Story and the key figure of the Story of Scripture itself. There is no way that I can exaggerate the significance, import and influence of Christ Jesus or fully articulate the myriad lessons we can glean from His Birth, Life, Ministry, Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, Ongoing Work and Ultimate Return!

NOTE 1 – I simply want to note ONE key lesson we can glean from the presence of Christ in the Christmas Story...

NOTE 2 – His presence teaches us that we desperately need a Savior. If man was able to save himself, God the Father would never have sent His Son to work on our behalf. The presence of Christ in the Story communicates once for all that we must abandon any-and-all hope of saving ourselves (i.e., relinquishing self-sufficiency)...

QUOTE – “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.” –Max Lucado

NOTE 3 – Have you trusted in Christ and received in this gift of the Father? If not, let today be that day!

NOTE 4 – This AM it is my joy to bring you good news that will cause great for all people. Two-thousand-years ago, in the town of David, a Savior was born unto you; He is Christ, the Messiah and Lord. What was conceived in Mary was from the Holy Spirit and according to the purpose of God, and she gave birth to a Son named Jesus, who came, died, rose again and lives forevermore to save people from their sins. This day He invites you to become His own, a citizen of His kingdom—a kingdom that will never end. What say you?

CONCLUSION

Thank for taking the time to join us on Christmas Day! We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org

NOTE 2 – Feel free to participate in our “beyond-Sunday” ministries (MM, WM, CYC, Study)

NOTE 3 – The 2022 ABM will take place on Sunday, January 22, 2023, following the Sunday Morning Service (January 29 as a backup date in case of inclement weather). The deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, January 1, 2023. Lastly, a slate of candidates qualified to stand for election—for the Board positions of Deacon and Trustee—has been posted in the Fellowship Hall. If your name appears on said list, please notify the Pastor of your intentions by Sunday, January 8, 2023, and ONLY after prayerful consideration!

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.