

December 24, 2012  
*It's a Wonderful Life*

Treasure It!  
Luke 2:1-20

### **Opening words:**

During this season of Advent I have been using the classic Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, as a backdrop for my sermon series. The question is not if you have seen the movie. The question is how many times have you seen the movie? The 1946 Frank Capra film speaks to every generation because everyone can relate to Jimmy Stewart's character, George Bailey. How many of your dreams have been crushed by responsibilities? Tonight, I conclude this sermon series by remembering the last scene. You remember. The people in George's life affirm him by coming to his rescue. May God give you ears to hear this evening's Gospel lesson, Luke 2:1-20. Let me call this message *It's a Wonderful Life: Treasure It!*

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### **Luke 2:1-20**

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 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. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her

heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

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How many times have you seen the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*? Then, you know the storyline. Absent minded Uncle Billy has lost \$8,000 of the Bailey Building and Loan's money. The bank examiner suddenly arrives and George begins to panic. Without success, George looks everywhere. With his shattered dreams in his hands, he decides to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge. He is saved by his guardian angel, angel second class, Clarence Oddbody. He is the one who grants George's wish. He shows George what his world would be like if he had never been born. The picture is not pretty. His wife never married so his children were never born. His mother struggles to survive. His brother, Harry, drowns so others he saved during the war also die. Uncle Billy is institutionalized. His town, Bedford Falls, was run by his enemy, Mr. Potter. It is renamed Potterville. In light of this new information George begins to realize the difference he has made on his world. With nowhere else to go he returns to the bridge. George begins to pray and asks for his old life back. His request is granted. He happily returns home knowing he is going to be arrested. All this sets up the final scene. When he returns home, he has a new appreciation for his old life. He embraces his children and looks for his wife, Mary. She is the one who saves the day. Mary has told the whole town George is in trouble. They respond by showing up at the Bailey home. Each one brings cash and openly expresses what George means to them. Brother Harry has the line that summarizes the whole movie. He lifts his glass and says, "To George Bailey, the richest man in town!" This is the question I must ask you on this Christmas Eve. How rich are you?

Can anyone here relate to George Bailey? When you were young you had dreams of seeing the world. You longed for fame and fortune. You knew it was only a matter of time but time changed everything. The longer you lived here in the Mahoning Valley, the harder it was to leave. In time, everyone in your life left the area. You stayed in the Youngstown area but you wonder about lost opportunities, elsewhere. Through the years the magic of the area wore off and your relationships grew stale. How close am I? Your name is not George Bailey but you are George Bailey? Does anyone here have a few regrets? What part of your life do you take for granted?

This evening I want to give you some pastoral advice. I would encourage you to appreciate everything thing about your life. Each one of us has been blessed in many ways. We have good lives. Don't be like George Bailey, who took his good life for granted. Embrace everything about your life. Appreciate your relationships. Appreciate your opportunities. Most of all, appreciate **your Savior**. It is those three things I want to talk about this evening. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **Your Relationships**

Never take your relationships for granted! How would your life change if one of your loved one was suddenly gone? There are people in our world this evening who are forced to answer that question. They live in Newtown, Ct. You know the sad story. Twenty year old Adam Lanza broke into Sandy Hook Elementary School and began

shooting. In a matter of minutes he took twenty-six lives. Six of the victims were educators. Twenty of the victims were precious children. The debate began once the news broke. How do we prevent future violence? Everyone seems to have an opinion. Some say we need new laws. Others say we need more counselors. You know it is true. There is not a simple answer. If this story has taught us anything then it has taught us to appreciate all the relationships in their lives. How are those parents going to celebrate Christmas without their young? How are they ever going to celebrate Christmas again?

In the next twenty-four hours you are going to spend time with the most important people in your life. Some of you have traveled a long way to be here. Some have spent a great deal of money to spend time with you. Some of you are hosting these cherished guests. You have cleaned your homes from top to bottom. You have thought out the menu. You have purchased everyone the perfect gift. You have sacrificed your time and money and you would do it again. Why? Because you love them. How would your life have changed if they had never have been born? How would your life change if they were suddenly gone? Never take your relationships for granted. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Never take your relationships for granted!

### **Your Opportunities**

Never take your opportunities for granted! America is still the land of opportunity. If you can't make it here then you can't make it anywhere. How would your life change if you were forced to live in another country? The answer is a great deal. Almost six months ago, I have the opportunity to travel to Haiti. I was part of a mission team who observed the work of a mission project, who was attempting to reforest part of that nation. That trip changed me. I have never been to a place that had less opportunity than Haiti. It is only a two hour flight between Miami and Port-au-Prince. However, it is like you are on two different planets. The contrast was shocking. Did you know Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere? The average Haitian makes \$1.30 a day. How do you survive on a \$1.30 a day? The Haitian people were great. They were gracious and hard working. Their children pierced my heart. I like to think they have a bright future but I can't. They live in a country of no. There is no public school system. There is no postal system because there are no addresses. There is no form of health care. There is no electricity and no clean water to drink. There are no jobs. The unemployment rate is 80%. I really don't know what happened to all the money after the earthquake but I know there is no opportunity in Haiti for a better life.

Have you ever wondered why you were born in the United States of America? Did we win eternal power ball? You could have been born in Haiti. You could have been born a legless Russian orphan. You could have been born in North Korea. You could have been born in Africa or you could have been born in China. You know it is true. America has her issues. We have some work to do. This is not a perfect place but it is still the land of opportunity. Don't ever take your American citizenship for granted. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Never take your relationships for granted! Never take your opportunities for granted!

## **Your Savior**

Never take your Savior for granted! How would your life change if Jesus had never been born? This is the good news. Jesus was born. You know the story. A census was taken every fourteen years by the Romans. The population was counted for two reasons. The first was military service. The second was taxation. Every male was required to return to their hometown. Joseph returned to Bethlehem, the House of Bread. It would have taken him ten days to make that eighty miles trip between Nazareth and Bethlehem. You can drive it easily in two hours. In Joseph's case, it must have taken him longer. He was traveling with a young pregnant woman, Mary. When they finally arrived, they saw nothing but No Vacancy signs. They best they can do is accept an offer to sleep in the barn. Surrounded by animals, the baby is born. Everyone is surprised they didn't name him Joseph. They name him Jesus. The name is important because it summarizes his entire life. Jesus means "God is Salvation." You know how the story ends. Thirty three years later Jesus would be executed. It is upsetting, but it was all part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Jesus lived the perfect life so he was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Never take Jesus for granted.

When you have Jesus you have three things. First, when you have Jesus you have forgiveness. There is not a single person in this room who hasn't done something foolish in their life. Second, when you have Jesus you have hope. You have hope for a better world and the hope of heaven, itself. Third, when you have Jesus you have purpose. You are more than a consumer. You are more than some point on some demographic chart. You are a child of God. Never take your Savior for granted. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Is there a George Bailey in the room? Is there anyone here who is taking their life for granted? I hope the answer is no! I hope you appreciate everything about your life. As your pastor and your friend, I would encourage you to never take **your relationships** for granted. How would your life change if one of them was gone? I would encourage you to never take **your opportunities** for granted. We live in a great country. I would encourage you to never take **your Savior** for granted. The angels said it best:  
**Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.**

And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" May God bless each one of you on this sacred evening! Merry Christmas!