

December 24, 2017

Christmas Goes to the Movies

Home Alone

"Never Alone Again"

Luke 2:1-20

Opening words: This evening I conclude my Advent/Christmas sermon series, *Christmas Goes to the Movies*. If you have been with me from the beginning, you know that, according to Wikipedia, more than one hundred Christmas movies have been made through the years. Not every one is considered a classic. Have you ever watched *Santa Conquers the Martians* or *Grumpy Cats Worst Christmas Ever*? They are considered the two worst Christmas movies ever made. Only a few of them are considered classics. We have been looking at those movies in this sermon series. Do you remember my list? We have looked at *Christmas Vacation*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and, this morning, *Elf*. Next year, we may look at five more Christmas classics. Each one holds some important theological theme for the season. Tonight's movie, *Home Alone*, is no exception. How many times have you watched *Home Alone*?

Home Alone was released in 1990. It was made for \$18 million and has grossed approximately \$354,000,000. It was filmed in Winnetka, Illinois and stars Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, and Macaulay Culkin as Kevin McCallister. You remember the story line. Eight-year-old Kevin finds himself home alone, because he is lost in the shuffle, as his family leaves for their Christmas vacation. At first, he celebrates his independence, but in time he begins to value his family. This is the Good News for this evening: Because of the birth of Jesus, we will never be alone again; you will never be alone again. Our scripture reading is traditional for the evening, Luke 2:1-20. Let me call this message *Never Alone Again*.

Luke 2:1-20 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.

Mother Teresa once said, *“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the worst kind of poverty.”* This is Christmas Eve, and no one should feel alone. If you can name one person who loves you this evening, say, **“Amen!”**

How are you planning on celebrating Christmas? Our society loves Christmas. Even non-believers celebrate Christmas. Everyone knows Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. Do you remember the stewardship principle from a few weeks ago? We only spend money on things that are important to us. According to the National Retail Federation, Christmas is real important to Americans. They tell us the average American spent \$700 on Christmas this year. That means, as a country, we spent \$465 billion on Christmas. That is a great deal of money. Christmas is also the most expensive time of the year. It all adds up.

Has anyone here bought a Christmas tree? It doesn’t matter if your tree came out of the field or a box.

Has anyone here taken the time to decorate your house for Christmas? I bet you have the most festive house on the street.

Has anyone here spent your time and money to send out Christmas cards? Maybe you have taken the time to write a family letter to place in that Christmas card, to boast about your family’s accomplishments in the past twelve months?

Has anyone here spent a small fortune to spend Christmas in Youngstown, Ohio? In your heart, you still consider this place home.

Has anyone one here bought a Christmas present, or two? You can’t wait to see how your loved ones will react to them. Maybe, there is a gift under the tree for you too?

Has anyone here attended, or hosted, a Christmas party in the last few weeks? Christmas is a time of celebration.

Is anyone here planning on cooking a big meal for your family tomorrow? It is important to you that no one goes hungry. Tomorrow is a good day to not worry about calories.

There are 365 days every year, but Christmas day is different. We, both believers and non-believers, celebrate Christmas because it is the most wonderful time of the year. But for those of us who believe, Christmas is more than just the spirit of a holiday. Christmas is about the Incarnation.

According to UNICEF, 130 million babies are born annually. (They also tell us 55.3 million people die annually.) That is a mountain of dirty diapers. Have you ever stopped to consider how many babies have been born in the past 2,000 years? Have you ever stopped to consider how many babies have been born in the history of the world? The birth of every child should be celebrated, but Christmas is about the birth of one child. Christmas is the time to celebrate the birth of *the* baby, Jesus.

We find ourselves this evening in the second chapter of Luke. You know the story. We visit it annually. Caesar Augustus, who sat on the throne of the Roman Empire from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14, issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. It happened when Quirinius was governor over Syria. That makes the date between A.D. 6 and 9. (Remember, the calendar was adjusted sometime in the past.) It will suffice to say, it was a long time ago. However, some things don't change.

The census was taken for two reasons, taxation and military service. The law stated that everyone was required to go to their hometown to be counted. That meant Joseph went to Bethlehem, near Jerusalem. He did not travel alone; he traveled with a young pregnant teenager by the name of Mary. Her relationship with Joseph was complex. According to the scriptures, Mary was a virgin. The word 'virgin' in the Bible does not mean young girl, it means sexually innocent. In other words, she had never had sexual intercourse with a man, yet she was pregnant. Those of us of faith know the Holy Spirit came upon her, so she was carrying the son of God. Timing is everything. The young couple must have worried the child would come during the journey. The child waited until they arrived in Bethlehem. Any Sunday school student will tell you where the child was born. The baby Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. They named the baby Jesus. The name Jesus means "Savior." Mary and Joseph's society almost missed the big event. They were just another poor couple having a baby. However, that birth changed our world. If that sounds a little familiar, say, "**Amen!**" Yet, there is more to the story.

Thirty years later, Jesus is a man. He goes out to the Jordan River to be baptized. I do not know why Jesus needed to be baptized. It was a sinner's baptism and Jesus was sinless. However, that event marked the beginning of his earthly ministry. For three years, Jesus tried to teach people about the Kingdom of God, but his words seemed to fall on deaf ears. The only thing he ever did was love everyone, but that was more than

his enemies could tolerate. Jesus, the baby in the manger thirty-three years earlier, was executed on a Friday by the Romans on a cross. Those who loved him grieved and were filled with hopelessness on Saturday. On Sunday morning, their spirits changed. Somehow, miraculously, Jesus was resurrected. Death could not hold him. I can't scientifically say how the virgin birth or the resurrection happened, but those two events changed everything. The absence of either one means there is no Christian faith and no hope of salvation. Believers embrace Christmas because we understand that the birth of Jesus means there is no turning back. God became one of us and we would never be alone again. That is why we believers celebrate Christmas. If you are thankful Jesus died for your sins, say, "**Amen!**"

His name was Kevin McCallister. There is no other way to say it: He was an annoying eight-year-old, without a filter. He tests the patience of his entire family and finds himself being punished the night before the family trip to Paris. (The McCallister's obviously had a hard life.) In the chaos of the morning, Kevin is left behind. His absence is not discovered until it is too late. The family is in Paris and Kevin is home alone, forced to protect his family's home from two idiotic buglers, Harry and Marv. In the end, Kevin prevails and a lesson is learned. Kevin begins to value his family, even his equally annoying older brother Buzz. Do you remember the last scene in the movie? It is one of my favorites. Thanks to the Polka King of the Midwest and the Kenosha Kickers, Kevin's mother returns home on Christmas morning. It is a wonderful scene in the movie. At first Kevin is mad, but his heart soon melts. He embraces his mother, and seconds later the whole family returns. It is a wonderful scene because we can all relate to it. Home Alone isn't just another Christmas movie. It is the story of Christmas itself.

Christmas should be celebrated because God came to us. We will never be alone again. Mother Teresa wasn't wrong. She once said, "*Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the worst kind of poverty.*" May God bless us as we celebrate this great day! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

To watch the video clip, paste the following link in your browser:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KidFtswAI2g&feature=youtu.be>