



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Christmas at the Movies: Elf

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Psalm 146:1-10

Luke 1:46-55

Today our Advent series turns to a much newer Christmas movie, but one that is already making the lists of popular Christmas movies, “Elf.”

For those who may not have seen the movie, the story begins when Santa Claus visits an orphanage on Christmas Eve. While Santa is busy eating cookies, a baby climbs out of his crib and crawls toward a teddy bear in Santa’s sack, and becomes a stowaway back to the North Pole.

This human baby is raised by the elves, and they call him Buddy, and in school he learns the Code of the Elves: One, *Treat every day like Christmas*; Two, *There is always room on the Nice List*, and Three, *The best way to spread Christmas Cheer is singing loud for all to hear*.

It is this code that guides the rest of the movie and points us to the real Christmas Story. So let’s start by looking at the second rule of the code first: There’s room for everyone on the nice list.

Buddy’s North Pole world is turned upside down when Buddy finds that he is not an elf but a human. But the real tragedy for him is finding out first that his human mother has died, and then, second, that his human father is not on the nice, but is very much on the naughty list.

So Buddy leaves his home at the North Pole to go to a strange country called New York City. He meets his step-mother and Michael, his 12-year old step brother who

latches on to Buddy; but then who wouldn't latch on to a big brother who tells you that the 4 main food groups are Candy, Candy Canes, Candy Corn, and Syrup.

He meets Jovie, a Macy's salesclerk; he finds her singing in front of a mirror and tells her how beautiful her singing is, but she tells him that she just can't sing in front of other people.

And then he meets his Dad, who did not know he had a son, but who shows why he's on the naughty list. He makes it very clear he doesn't want to meet Buddy; he ignores him, has thrown him out of his office building; but Buddy just loves him, and he won't stop loving his father. Buddy's love is unconditional.

Buddy's mission to get his Dad on the nice list is played out, literally, with a pesky, persevering, passionate, persistent love that reveals the Christmas Spirit.

And that leads us back to the first rule on the Code of the Elves: Treat every day like Christmas.

What does it look like to treat every day like Christmas? A day filled with things like the love of family, the joy of reaching out to friends, the peace of a gentle touch that reaches across the years, the kindness and goodness shared in our communities, the faithfulness we remember as we worship and celebrate a God who loves us.

Living like every day is Christmas also means recapturing a sense of awe and wonder in life, the mystery and joy of God's presence in our world.

A mother was asking her 5-year-old what he wanted for Christmas. He had circled most everything in the Target toy catalog, but he told her, “Something I’ve never had before...toy surprises.”

That’s it, isn’t it? Christmas is something we’ve never had before, surprised by God in this little baby...and shepherds and wise men come searching for him.

To treat every day like Christmas, we need to be looking for him in our world, to experience the awe and wonder, this surprise presence of God every day in all of life.

Buddy reminds us to find the joy and laughter in the little things we often overlook or take for granted especially as we grow older. Every day is an adventure that he just can’t wait to begin.

He could have let the world beat him down and lose his joy, but Buddy’s spirit is indomitable. The point is that Buddy is excited and curious and wonderfully open in a very jaded, guarded world. And couldn’t we all stand to be a bit more like that? I know I could.

His enthusiasm and openness offers hope in a cynical world of disbelief. And, thankfully, that goodness has a ripple effect on those around him.

Now the third rule of the Code of the Elves says this: The best way to spread Christmas Cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

Buddy teaches us that even when others may not be singing or sharing the Christmas spirit, it is important that we do, and to do it loud and clear.

Christmas is for music and singing. Singing, whether it's beautiful singing like last Sunday's concert or off-key, ought-to-be-off-the-planet singing like mine, singing is one of the ways we humans express joy.

And since the essential note of the Christian faith is joy; it's good and right and proper for Christmas to be the season of singing.

It's a powerful scene in the movie when Santa's sleigh is grounded in Central Park and can't fly because people just don't have the Christmas spirit like they used to, and Santa's running on empty!

Jovie remembers what Buddy the Elf said about spreading Christmas cheer; and this 'doesn't like to sing in front of crowds' young woman stands up in the midst of a doubting, Christmas-spiritless crowd and starts to sing.

Then the crowd starts to sing along with her. Santa's sleigh gets the lift it needs, and everyone is a little better off for singing loud for all to hear.

Singing loud for all to hear is what they do in the Bible. Like our psalmist this morning, "I will sing praises to my God all my life long."

You find it all over and around the Christmas story; people are singing, angels are singing.

Old Zechariah at the Temple breaks into song when the angel tells him that at a ripe old age, he is going to be a daddy for the first time. (He was, you remember, the father of John the Baptist.)

The angels are singing as a backdrop to the announcement of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. And our Scripture Lesson this morning, we heard Mary's song as she reflected on her role as God's chosen servant to give birth to the Messiah. Her song is called the "Magnificat."

It's the word in the first verse, *magnifies*: "*My soul magnifies the Lord*"; and isn't that what joy is all about: magnifying, spreading the presence and power and passion of God for all to hear.

I tell you something that you already know, and that is, how blessed this church is with its music ministry: all the choirs, the musicians that contribute, our organist, and of course, our director...you know that, don't you?

The music helps us magnify our worship. We all depend on the music, the songs that carry our faith, that lifts our spirits, that gives words to our feelings.

When Mary sang that song, Judea was a very troubled country. People lived behind closed doors, if they had a house to live in, for they were afraid of the Roman army or the corrupt government or the religious zealots, the terrorists of their day.

Here, in the dark of that night, a young girl's voice sings out: "*My soul magnifies the Lord... the Mighty One has done great things for me...*"

Mary's song is a song of faith: She says that God is always faithful, every day is God's day, and this is God's world, and the only true power and might and strength reside with God.

Mary's song reminded herself and her nation that God had been faithful to them through all of the good times, but even more so when their faith was tested, during the challenging times, through wars and famine and rebellions and exile.

Mary's song is also a song of hope: Mary sang and lived what the Apostle Paul, maybe building on this very story, when he writes in his letter to the Romans how creation has been groaning in labor pains: *"For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope...But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

According to John Claypool, hope "is the energy and fuel that animate life. Hope is to the spirit what breath is to the body."

You see, our hope is not based upon what we can do; our hope is based upon what God can do.

Mary's song is a song of faith and hope.

And Mary's song is also a song of love: Mary is singing loud and clear for all to hear about a God who has made the decision not to give up on the world but redeem it, not trash it but restore it, or as someone put it, "That we may know that God's goodness is greater than all our badness."

She is singing about a God who is for us, a God who loves us with a love that will not abandon us at our worst or in our darkest hour.

Mary's song is a song of faith and hope and love.

Mary's song is our song and it carries the Christmas message for 2019, which is this: neither deranged gunmen nor violent terrorists, not Wall Street or Capitol Hill, neither conservative nor liberal, neither great riches nor lost jobs, neither disease nor disaster, not pain, not grief, not our pleasures or our possessions, neither family difficulties nor personal failure, ...will have the final word in our lives.

I like what Gail O'Dea says about Mary's song. She says that "we, too, are called to...remember who God is and what God has done and to sing... (to) look back and sing forward."

Sing forward. Sing Mary's song loud for all to hear and let your soul magnify the Lord, give yourself in trust to a God for whom all things are possible.

Sing forward. Sing Mary's song loud for all to hear about a God who can turn a hopeless world upside down and who every day fills your life with good news of great joy.

Let Mary's song be your song, the celebration of faith and hope and love that gives words to the presence and power and passion of God.

Sing it loud for all to hear!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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