

“A Christmas Story.”

I remember the first time I saw the movie “A Christmas Story.” I stumbled across it while flipping channels one Christmas Eve. The story was a hoot. There was the eccentric father, the long-suffering wife and mother, and their two boys Randy and Ralphie. Their lives and their adventures were right out of postwar American lore.

The movie got to me and lots of other Baby Boomers for the sense of time and place it captured. In 1986, the year I first saw “A Christmas Story,” the optimism and naiveté of Postwar America had been replaced by post-Vietnam suspicion and cynicism and the self-absorbed Me Generation of the 80s. Ralphie’s simple longing for a Red Ryder BB gun had been replaced by Wall Street’s mantra “greed is good.”

The problem with the kind of memories captured in “A Christmas Story” is their specificity. Those memories are part of the zeitgeist of an era, that when it has passed becomes the stuff of yellowed photographs and faulty memories and it can never to be recaptured.

For me true Christmas, the one that we are celebrating this evening, is very different. In fact, the night that I saw “A Christmas Story” may have been the moment when I realized that. For as soon as the movie finished my girlfriend and I headed off to church. Experiencing these two side by side put into sharp relief Ralphie’s secular Christmas which had all of the cultural trappings of snow, parades, trees, and Santa but none of the Christian meaning.

Where was the Virgin Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, the shepherds watching over their flocks, and angelic hosts from Luke’s Gospel? I realized that somewhere along the line Christmas as the day of our Messiah’s birth was getting lost to the commercialism that has a stranglehold on our society.

All is not lost by any means. We who are gathered here are aware that the greatest gift at Christmas is not to be found under a tree but in a manger. God’s gift to us is a little child born to poor parents in a backwater of the Roman Empire. But, in contrast to Roman Emperors and others who have held sway during the intervening centuries Jesus’ life has not been relegated to history books and museums. His life, teaching, sacrifice and resurrection are part of our life and bring us here this night.

Each year when we return to **the** Christmas story we have the opportunity to do more than remember a bygone time or fond memory. We have the opportunity for the Christ child to be born again in the manger of our heart. We can welcome the newborn savior into a place we have prepared inside ourselves that is as warm and welcoming as any manger or swaddling clothes.

In a little while we will sing a song with words from a man known as Angelus Silesius—the messenger from Silesia. He was a 17th century Polish mystic, poet and Franciscan monk. He wrote “If in your heart you make a manger for his birth, then God will once again become a child on earth.”

Gene LeCouteur
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, VA

4:00 & 10:00 p.m.
December 24, 2018
Christmas Eve, Year C

This wonderful invitation is given to each of us by God. We can open our heart and prepare it to receive the newborn Christ child into our life. When we do we will be changed. The change will not be recorded in photos or nostalgic movies. The change will be recorded in our life. The effect, like the flutter of a butterfly's wings, will ripple out into a world that is in need of hope. That hope is God's promise of love and salvation sent to us two thousand years ago, and every year, through a little baby known as Jesus—"God Saves" and also as Emmanuel—"God With Us."

May you be blessed this night by the new birth of Christ in your heart. May his presence grow within you throughout this season and year to come. May you be blessed and a blessing all the days of your life.