

Obviously this is going to be a very short sermon since our kids have given the most important message of all for this time of the year. Praise God for them, their families and teachers for preparing and bringing this message to us today. Well done! Thank you!

Since I've been giving this sermon series - Christ in Christmas movies - and next Sunday evening, Dec. 19 at 5:30 PM we'll be gathering outside on our patio to watch the movie *The Polar Express*, and since the kids are staying with us in worship today, I thought I'd say just a few words about that movie this morning.

This animated movie - *The Polar Express* - is about a fantasy train ride to the North Pole that seems to be happening, but also might be the dream of a young boy getting old enough to wonder about the existence of Santa Clause. It's based on a fantastic book called *The Polar Express*. The storyline of the movie is that various kids are invited to board a magical train - *The Polar Express* - as it passes right outside their homes at midnight - for reasons specific to their situations. None of the kids in the movie are given names, which is convenient, because we can give them our own names if we relate to them. There are four main character children - one is a main hero boy, the second a main hero girl, the third a boy called Know-it-All and the fourth is called "Lonely Boy".

As the train winds toward the North Pole, we're given glimpses into the lives and the children and what they struggle with in this season - amid amazing songs and graphics and wild twists and turns on the railway. One of the most fun parts of this movie is that Tom Hanks does a wonderful job as the voice of not only the main adult character, the Train Conductor, but also four other adult characters. I won't tell you which ones, I'll let you watch the movie for yourself and see if you can tell which other four characters he also plays.

As I've been creating this sermon series, I've actually found multiple ways in each movie that something is said about God through Christ and our Christian journey. The same can definitely be said about this movie *The Polar Express*. It's definitely worth watching if you haven't seen it, or watching again if you haven't seen it lately. Actually, in my immediate family, part of our Christmas tradition since my kids have been

young is to attend the early Christmas Eve worship service, go out to Denny's for dinner in between my work hours and then when I get home later at night, to watch this movie together before going to bed. So this movie for me holds a special place in my heart.

For today, what I want to say briefly about this movie in relation to our scripture text is about the character of the "Lonely Boy".

What we come to understand about this character is that amidst the joys of Christmas that seem to surround this time of year, we also have deep hurts or struggles that cause us grief. Our griefs are different for each of us and sometimes they make it hard to see joy through them. This boy's grief, as the story alludes, is that his family experiences scarcity of resources, so he hasn't experienced Santa visiting his house at Christmas. In this way, as he says in the movie - "Christmas just doesn't work out for me."

[Either watch this clip on DVD or digital version of *The Polar Express* or go to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n4Hz7qksiw>

MOVIE CLIP - The Polar Express

Start: 49:41 Having arrived at the North Pole, the conductor lines up children and says "All right ladies & gentleman. Two columns if you please"

End: 51:23 Hero Girl says to Lonely Boy, "Yes, come with us, we'll go together."

There are MANY exciting twists and turns in this movie and from this scene you can tell these children seem to be in trouble again. I'll let you watch to see how it turns out rather than telling you.

But the part I want to focus on is the Hero Boy's line, - "Look, I don't know whether Christmas is going to work out for you or not. But this is Christmas Eve, don't stay here by yourself." This is exactly what Mary did in our scripture passage that we heard today. In the midst of, what I assume were many emotions after agreeing to bear the Son of God - most likely - fear, astonishment, confusion and grief at this major change in her life from planning a wedding and being a newlywed to becoming an object of scorn - what did she do? As it

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Luke 1:35-49

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tells us in verse 39 - Mary set out and went with haste to be with her relative, Elizabeth.

It seems highly likely that Mary and Elizabeth were close relatives since the story tells us Mary went immediately to see Elizabeth - not her own mother, relative or another friend nearby. It's traditionally understood that Elizabeth lived in a hill country called Ein Karem just outside of Jerusalem, which was about 100 miles from Nazareth where Mary lived. Ein Karem was over 1000 feet in elevation from Nazareth- a dirt path that wound through the mountainous region known to be patrolled by bandits - though it's also likely Mary wouldn't have been travelling alone since people generally travelled by caravan in those days.

At Elizabeth's side, however, once she gets there, Mary is also filled with the Holy Spirit and is inspired to respond with a song of praise - "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed."

This is known as "The Magnificat" after the first word in the song in Latin "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" - My soul magnifies the Lord.

The phrase - For He has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant - reminds us in this story of Christ's conception and the story of the conception and birth of John the Baptist, that God looks with favor on our lowliness on our griefs and desires to be right next to us in the midst of them - God wants us to choose to never be alone, even though we aren't sure how things will work out or how long we'll feel the difficult feelings that accompany this life.

As it says in 2 Corinthians - the book I've been personally reading in my morning devotions - "For Christ was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. We are weak, but will live with Jesus - by the power of God... we rejoice when we are weak as God is strong in us."

This season - amidst our struggles, let us continue to find joy in togetherness - with one another and by reaching out to God through the means of grace - prayer, worship, scripture reading, acts of mercy and justice, confession, fasting just to name a few. And if

you come upon one who's lonely as our hero girl says - offer this, "Come with me. Let's go together."