



## **EVERYBODY CAN DO SOMETHING GOOD, CHARLIE BROWN**

*Scripture:*

**Luke 1:67-79**

### **Zechariah's prophesy – he will guide the people in peace**

67. And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,
68. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people,
69. and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
70. as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71. that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us;
72. to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,
73. the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,
74. to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
75. in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.
76. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77. to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,
78. through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high
79. to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'



### **ADVENT BEGINS**

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. Our theme today is "Hope." This is the first of the four Sundays prior to Christmas.

Christmas begins with the story of Jesus' birth, and the prophesies that preceded them. As the next four weeks unfold, we will tell those stories, sing those stories, watch films and hear scholarship about those stories, and we will reenact those stories.

### **TRADITIONS**

In addition to the birth stories, our Christmas celebrations now include:

- the traditions from the Church of the Middle Ages – the crèche for example;
- traditions from Germany – the evergreen tree for example;
- from the British Isles – lights that bring life to the long days of winter, for example;
- from a professor at Columbia University who wrote a story for his children that incorporated

the traditions of Europe with some imagination of his own, in a short story called *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. In 1823, Clement Moore gave us the tradition of Santa Claus as it is remembered in America today. At the time, he was Professor of Biblical Learning at a theological seminary, and a visiting professor at Columbia College.

### **MODERN TRADITIONS**

I'll have more to say about a couple of even more modern traditions in just a moment.

I hope none of us has become a Christmas bigot. There are many ways to remember the love of God expressed at Christmas. We can find something good in each one of them, and we can also find fault. There are many ways to recall the rebirth of hope into our lives, and there are many communities who long for peace with justice all across the world. We will never exhaust the meaning of Christmas.

Let's begin with the scripture of a father's joy.

### **A FATHER'S JOY**

Today's scripture is the prophesy of Zechariah that he will guide the people in peace.

Zechariah had a great vision for his son. He thought of him as the prophet and the forerunner who would prepare the way of the Lord. All devout Jews hoped and longed for the day when the Messiah, God's anointed king, would come. Most of them believed that before he came, a forerunner would announce his coming and prepare his way. The usual belief was that Elijah would return to do so (Malachi 4:5). Zechariah saw in his son the one who would prepare the way for the coming of God's king.

So there is a pattern that begins the Christian era.

There is preparation. All life is a preparation to lead us to Christ.

There is discovery. The Greeks thought of a passionless God, beyond all joy and sorrow, looking on men in calm unmoved detachment--no help there. The Jews thought of a demanding God, whose name was law and whose function was that of judge--nothing but terror there. Jesus said God was love, and in staggered amazement, people could only say, "We never knew that God was like that."

### **SOMETHING OLD; SOMETHING NEW**

Each year we add something new to the traditions of old. People look for something new at the movies, in the technology and appliance stores, and in our political candidates. But we need to anchor the new in the Christmas story that is not new, and we love it because it is old.

On Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m., I invite you to two special nights at the movies. We'll see excellent commentary on the gospel from the Life of Christ Series, which combines modern scholarship with the geographical context.

### **FAMILY MEMORIES OF THE HOLIDAYS**

Each of our families has developed our own traditions at the holidays based upon the traditions of our faith.

I remember when Molly was the angel in the Christmas pageant at church, or was it Jessica? I remember the decorating of the tree and the making of gingerbread houses, and the Christmas we spent at the cabin with our family in 1960, or was it 1970? I remember it like it was yesterday. And so do you.

One of our favorite Christmas traditions is watching the movie, "*The Christmas Story*," about the boy who wanted a BB gun at Christmas. He reminds my mother of a young blond boy whom she used to know. He got the BB gun, but not before the turkey was snatched from the table by a gang of dogs, and not before dad's major award was broken into pieces, and not before the family ended up in the Chinese restaurant having roast duck for dinner.

**But if there were to be a vote in my family about the most important modern story of Christmas, there would be an easy winner.**

**We gathered together to watch a gang of animated neighborhood children who put on a Christmas pageant of their own, who watched a crazy dog named Snoopy steal the show, and who found the puniest little tree in the Christmas tree lot, decorated it with lights, and one of the children wrapped his very own security blanket around its base.**

(Background music played by Althea Wright on the Clavinova – *Christmas Time Is Here*)

Christmas is here but the children just don't have the Christmas spirit. "It all seems just so commercial," one of the children says to himself. "There must be something wrong with me."

He talks with Lucy, the child psychiatrist. Her advice is that he should direct the Christmas play at the school. And Lucy introduces him to the children in the program. But it is an unruly cast of

characters that includes a dog that sometimes seems strangely human, and a boy who still carries his security blanket with him.

So this is the year that Charlie Brown was volunteered to direct the children's Christmas play at school, at a time when schools still had Christmas plays. The cast realizes that Charlie Brown is way over his head directing the Christmas play, and so they send him off with Linus to pick out the Christmas tree instead. "Bring us back a beautiful aluminum tree that has the feel of Christmas to it." And as he leaves one child says, "... and make sure it's a pink Christmas tree."

Charlie Brown shrugs to think about the pink aluminum trees. "O good grief."

(Music – *O Christmas Tree*)

Charlie Brown and Linus find a small evergreen tree that needs to be rescued from the Christmas tree lot. I would guess it was a tree lot just outside of a town like Sebastopol or Petaluma. Then again, maybe it was a tree lot in a small town in northern Michigan, but I've never met the author of the story, so I don't know for sure.

The small evergreen tree on a wooden stand loses needles every time someone walks near it. Some people would think it is the ugliest tree in the whole Christmas tree lot. But Charlie Brown likes it, and he determines that this will be the tree used to decorate the stage in the Christmas pageant. It is the most sincere. So they take the skinny little tree back to the school.

When he shows the tree to the other children, they all laugh at him. "You blockhead, Charlie Brown! This isn't a pink aluminum tree. This is just a tree that is too small and too scrawny to give anybody the Christmas spirit!"

Charlie Brown feels he is the laughing stock of the neighborhood. Even his dog laughs at him. This is so humiliating. Charlie Brown finally admits, "Then I guess I just don't understand the true meaning of Christmas."

So Linus steps forward and says, "I'll tell you what the true meaning of Christmas is, Charlie Brown." All the children become quiet as Linus does something no cartoon character would ever dare to do on television today. He begins to recite some verses from the Bible.

(Joseph went) to Bethlehem...to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered.

And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Now in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day, in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among all people with whom the Lord is well pleased!"

A smile of enchantment returns to Charlie Brown's face. As if under a religious spell, he picks up the tree from the top of Schroeder's piano, and walks out the school door back to his home. As he proudly carries his tree home, the stars above him twinkle in the sky and remind him of the words that Linus has just spoken.

But once again, Charlie Brown's mood is shattered when he returns home to find that Snoopy's doghouse has won first prize for decorations. Snoopy has put lights and tinsel all over his dog house, and right in the middle is a bright gold ribbon that proclaims that he has won first place in the neighborhood Christmas decorations contest. I wondered if the

neighborhood was in Santa Rosa. But as I said, I have never met the author, so it is a mystery.

#### Music – *Christmas Time is Here*

Charlie Brown has an idea. He takes the decorations from the doghouse and puts them on the tree. As a final touch, Linus wraps his very special security blanket around the base of the tree. This scrawny tree symbolizes what Christmas is all about. Christmas is finding love in unexpected places, wrapping your most treasured security blanket around the symbols of love, and joining with the angels to sing glory to God in the highest, peace on earth to all people.

And that is a Charlie Brown Christmas. It originally aired on television in 1965 -- that's 42 years ago. We watched it first when we were newly married, we watched it with our first baby, and with our second, and with our third. I hope you have watched this film with loved ones too.

Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown! Thanks for reminding us of the meaning of Christmas once again this year. Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown.

#### Music. *O Christmas Tree, reprise*

### **EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING GOOD, CHARLIE BROWN**

The scriptures say, "A little child will lead them." A little child will lead us to Christmas.

In our family, one of the children who led us to Christmas every year was Charles Brown; I was always particularly fond of Linus; and one of our daughters is certainly a lot like Lucy. Children often lead us to Christmas.

"Everybody can do something good, Charlie Brown."

### **TREES AND TRADITIONS**

This church has a tradition of displaying enormous Christmas trees that were large enough to be seen from the last rows of the sanctuary. I have seen pictures of the legendary floating tree that was suspended miraculously in front of the organ pipes.

But our tree this year doesn't look very much like the floating tree. It looks like the one we had last year when we told the story of Charlie Brown's Christmas, and someone said, "John wouldn't it be great if we could have Jean Schulz come to church and dedicate our little tree for us."

I smiled and said, "It sure would." But Inside I thought, "That could never happen." How could anyone ever know the family of the man who was part of one of our family's favorite Christmas traditions? It would take some kind of a miracle.

So today we begin the season with "some kind of a miracle." Maybe a small miracle compared to the great miracles. But I'll take a small one, if it reminds me of the true meaning of Christmas and our traditions and our children. For me, the story, the traditions and the children are what Christmas is all about.

### **JEAN SCHULZ**

Today we have with us Jean Schulz to light a Christmas tree just like the one that Charlie Brown picked out for the children in the Christmas story.

Jean, I have known your family for decades, and now it is a pleasure to say, "How nice it is to finally meet you. Welcome to the Church of the Roses, Mrs. Charlie Brown."



**Dr. John H. Cushman**  
**Presbyterian Church of the Roses**  
**2500 Patio Court**  
**Santa Rosa, CA 95405**  
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