



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Advent Parables

I recently heard a grandparent scold their child in Wal-Mart. That is not too unusual in this day and age. It seems that the child, who appeared to be all of about four or five years of age, had picked up a DVD and wanted his grandmother to buy it for him. Again, that is not very unusual either. What was unusual was that this DVD was one of the traditional Christmas stories that makes its rounds this time of year. The boy asked her for the DVD and as she turned around to face him, she rolled her eyes and sighed loudly in a disapproving tone before proceeding to fuss at the youngster.

It seems that the grandmother did not want her grandson to be wasting his time on that "Christmas, make believe non-sense." She reminded him that he was a "Christian boy" and that he needed to be studying about Jesus in the Bible at Christmas, not wasting his time on foolish stories and make-believe. She quickly snatched the DVD from his hand, tossed it back on the rack and pulled him along behind her as she went to look at cell phones. The boy looked back at the DVD and his face just drooped as he was drug on down the aisle.

Now, I do not know the history or the background of that family. I do not know if a five dollar DVD was an extravagance for a grandmother on a fixed income. I do not even know if the child could read or if he knew what the DVD was about. However, the incident did get me to thinking about how we share our faith and the practice of our faith with our children and our grandchildren at this time of year. We go to church, we put up a tree, we sing carols, we tell "The Christmas Story" and we exchange presents. Then it seems to be a race to pack everything up and move on to New Years just as fast as we can so that we can get on with life. Is that all there is to it?

I think that the Grandmother in the store may have missed out on an opportunity to share her faith and make it real for her grandson when she tossed that DVD back onto the shelf. You see, Jesus came to this world as a baby so that He could share with us God's love and redemption. We still remember and honor that fact with His birth celebration at Christmas. But do we carry on that same task at Christmas that Jesus shared with us at His ascension to tell others about God's love and redemption?

When Jesus began His ministry to tell others about God and the Kingdom of Heaven, He taught from the scriptures; but He also told common, everyday stories to help make His teaching real and practical for the common person. He taught about God and how we should live our lives through the examples of farmers, merchants, fathers, children and others in His parables. His stories made His message plain and believable for everyone. When you come right down to it, is that not what so many of the

Hallmark specials, Christmas cartoons like “A Charlie Brown Christmas” and literary works such as Charles Dickens’s “A Christmas Carol” do also? Do they not also tell us of the needs and the rewards of loving others, serving others and sharing with others as God desires us to do in our lives?

Do not misunderstand me here; I am not saying that these stories and movies should take the place of the Scriptures at Christmas or that by themselves they are sufficient to share the message of the Christ. I am just saying that after we teach the Biblical part of the story, we need to be using our own modern day parables to help drive the point of our message, and the season, home to our friends and family alike. Read the nativity account from Luke and watch “A Charlie Brown Christmas” with your kids. Talk with them about both to help reinforce the true message of Christmas and make it real for them. Yes, there is a place for make-believe and the traditions of Christmastime, and we as the Church need to be capitalizing on all of the hoopla and putting it into the proper perspective for the next generation.

If you need some suggestions for how to start, here are a few stories you can begin with to read to your kids and grandkids to get the ball rolling. Who knows, maybe you just might start a new family tradition that will continue to share the true message of Christmas for generations yet to come.

Merry Christmas to all, especially those who have ears to hear,

James

- 1. The Gift of the Magi – O. Henry**
- 2. The Little Match Girl – Hans Christian Anderson**
- 3. A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens**
- 4. A Letter from Santa Claus – Mark Twain**
- 5. Papa Panov’s Special Christmas – Leo Tolstoy**
- 6. The Elves and the Shoemaker – Brothers Grimm**
- 7. Christmas Day in the Morning – Pearl S. Buck**
- 8. The Snowman – Raymond Briggs**
- 9. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer – Robert L. May**
- 10. A Kidnapped Santa Claus – L. Frank Baum**
- 11. The Holy Night – Selma Lagerlof**
- 12. At Christmas Time – Anton Chekhov**
- 13. The Christmas Rose – Lizzie Deas**
- 14. The Nutcracker and The Mouse King – E.T.A Hoffman**
- 15. The Christmas Cuckoo – Frances Browne**
- 16. The Other Wise Man – Henry Van Dyke**
- 17. The Burglar’s Christmas – Willa Cather**