

Christmas Eve

Luke 2: 1-20

December 24, 2014

"Merry Christmas"! God Becomes Man. Have You Ever Noticed That We Often Don't Appreciate Something Until It's Gone? That's One Of The Messages Of The Movie That Is Often Played At This Time Of The Year: **"It's A Wonderful Life"**. **Jimmy Stewart** Plays **George Bailey** Who Grows Up In A Midwestern Town Called **Bedford Falls**. **George** Desperately Wants To Leave **Bedford Falls** To Fulfill His Dreams And Ambitions But One Circumstance After Another Prevents It. On Christmas Eve It Appears That His Business And Loan Company, Inherited From His Father, Will Go Bankrupt And He Will Go To Jail Because A Large Sum Of Money Is Missing....Due To The Carelessness Of His Alcoholic **Uncle Billy**. It's A Snowy Night And **George** Is Standing On The Edge Of A Bridge Contemplating Suicide When Suddenly An Angel From Heaven, A Guardian Angel Intervenes. The Angel, Named, No Not **Gabriel**, But, **Clarence**, Tries To Convince **George** That His Death Wouldn't Solve Anything...But **George** Angrily Responds That It Would Have Been Better If He Had Never Been Born. Well, **Clarence** Thinks That Just A Great Idea To Teach **George** A Valuable Lesson. So He Grants **George's** Wish. The Rest Of The Movie Is **George** Seeing How Different Life Would Have Been For So Many People If He Had Never Been Born. His Life Affected So Many Others....For Good. * If **George** Had Never Been Born He Would Not Have Been Present To Save His Younger Brother From Drowning. And His Brother Would Not Have Been Alive To Win The Congressional Medal Of Honor By Saving The Life Of His Comrades In Battle. They Would Have All Died. * If **George** Had Never Been Born A Young Child Would Have Died From A Wrongly Filled Medical Prescription Because **George** Would Have Not Been There To Prevent It. * If **George** Had Never Been Born His Alcoholic **Uncle Billy** Would Have Been Admitted To A Psychiatric Unit For His Inability To Cope With Life. * If **George** Had Never Been Born His Mother Would Have Ended Up Being A Weary, Unhappy Old Woman Running A Boarding House With A Meager Income. * If **George** Had Never Been Born He Would Never Have Known The Joy And Love That He Received From His Wife **Mary** Or His Precious Children. There's More To The Story...But You Get The Idea. And So Did **George**. **George Bailey** Learned That, Despite All Of His Disappointments And Problems.... His Life Was **"A Wonderful Life"**. It's Christmas Eve. But What If Jesus Christ Had Never Been Born?

I. Pretend With Me. Jesus Christ Was Never Born. There Is No Christmas. Does It Make A Difference?

A. Well, Let's Start With The Obvious. If There Is No Jesus Christ....You Aren't Here Tonight. There Are No Christmas Lights Or Decorations.... No Busy Malls And The Buying And Giving Of Gifts. No Christmas Trees...Nothing. Nothing About

Christmas...Not Just Here In The Puget Sound...But Nowhere In The World...There Would Be Nothing...Absolutely Nothing About Christmas....Because Jesus Christ Was Not Born. Businesses Would Have To Find Some Other Way, Some Other Annual Event, To Save Them From Making Up For Their Losses For The Rest Of The Year. You Would Never Hear Anyone Say **“Merry Christmas”** Or Even **“Happy Holidays”** Because That Too Is Associated With Christmas. But It Gets Worse....If There Is No Christmas Then Of Course There Is No **“Good Friday”** Because Jesus Never Died On That Cross For The Sins Of The World... There Is No Comforting Message Of Peace With God... Of Complete And Unconditional Forgiveness Of Sins. There Is No Message Of Peace ...Either With God Or With Self. And If There If No **Good Friday** There Can't Be An **Easter** Either....Jesus Christ Wasn't Raised From The Dead On The Third Day. Without Jesus Christ There Is No Comforting And Hopeful Message Of Victory Over Death And Eternal Life In The Resurrection From The Dead.... If There Is No Christmas....There Is Just Death....You Live. You Die. That's It.

B. And Of Course, If Jesus Christ Wasn't Born There Would Still Be Many Religions In The World....But... **“The Christian Church”** Would Not Exist. **Messiah Lutheran Church** Would Not Be Here In This Place. Maybe There Would Be Homes Or Apartments. Not One Of The Wonderful Christmas Hymns That We Sing Tonight Would Have Been Written.. And Of Course, The Bible Wouldn't Exist Either....It Would Have Never Been Written...No Christmas Story Of Shepherd's Watching Their Flocks By Night. No Matthew, Mark, Luke And John Telling Us About Jesus' Death On The Cross And His Resurrection On The Third Day. No Paul Or Peter---Nothing. If Jesus Christ Had Never Been Born These Words Would Have Never Been Said Or Written: **“For God So Loved The World, That He Gave His Only Son, That Whoever Believes In Him Should Not Perish But Have Eternal Life” (John 3: 16, Esv).** And No One Would Ever Be Baptized In The Name Of The Father And Of The Son And Of The Holy Spirit. And No One Would Ever Receive The Body And Blood Of Jesus Christ In His Supper For The Forgiveness Of Their Sins.

Transition: Maybe It's My Bias...Could Be...But I Have A Hard Time Imaging A World Without Christmas; A World Without Jesus Christ; A World Without The Christian Church. Maybe It's My Bias...Could Be...But I Have A Hard Time Believing That This World Would Be A Better Place Without Christmas, A Better Place Without Jesus Christ, A Better Place Without The Christian Church..

Ii. George **Bailey** Appreciated His Life Only After He Saw How His Life Had Made A Difference In The Lives Of So Many Other People.....Only Then Did He See That He Truly Had **“A Wonderful Life.”** And So It Is With Jesus Christ.

A. For Praise Be To God.... There Is A Christmas! Just As The Angels Said To The

Shepherds: **“Glory To God In The Highest” (Luke 2: 13, Esv).** Jesus Christ Has Been Born! The Word Did Become Flesh! God Became One Of Us!.... For Thirty-Three Years He Dwelt Among Us. He Came Into Our Real World Of Sin And Death, Born In A Real Place Called **Bethlehem.** And He Would Die A Real Death On A Cross In The Real City Of **Jerusalem,** By The Hands Of A Real Roman Governor, **Pontus Pilate.** And On The Third Day Jesus Christ Really Was Raised From The Dead And Ascended Into Heaven And Sat Down At The Right Hand Of God The Father Almighty. And One Day He Really Will Come Again To Judge The Living And The Dead. And He Really Will Give Eternal Life In A New World To All Who Have Trusted In Him... As Their Savior From Sin And Death. All Of This Is True And All Of This Is Possible Because Christmas: The Birth Of Jesus Christ In **Bethlehem.** And Those Who Believe In Him Know The Difference It Makes In Their Lives.....And This Is Why I Can Say To You.....**“Merry Christmas!”**...(Congregation)

Transition. Now In The Movie **“It’s A Wonderful Life”** **George Bailey** Becomes A Changed Man, Seeing All Of Life In A Different Perspective. What Used To Bother Him...Didn’t Bother Him Anymore. Perhaps This Is Best Seen When He Races Home To See His Beloved Wife And Children, So Glad To Be Alive And So Thankful For His Blessings And When He Gets There The Bank Examiners Are Waiting For Him And He Says To Them: **“I’ll Be You’re The Bank Examiners. I’m Going To Jail Isn’t It Wonderful!?”** And Then He Goes On To Hug And Kiss His Wife And Children.

B. Christmas Doesn’t Make All Of Our Problems Go Away Either...But Christmas Changes Us. Christmas Helps Us To See Our Problems In A Different Light: The Light Of Christ Who Says In John's Gospel: **“In This World You Will Have Tribulation; But Take Heart...I Have Overcome The World” (16: 33, Esv).** **“Take Heart...I Have Overcome The World”.** This Was Said By The Man Who Was Born On That First Christmas. ...What A Daring Statement...He Has Overcome The World? Who Else Could Say Such A Thing Except Jesus Christ? Because Of Jesus Christ We Know Who We Are: A Forgiven Child Of God.... Because Of Jesus Christ We Know Why We Exist: To Love Him And To Love Others As We Love Ourselves. Because Of Jesus Christ We Have Hope: Death Is Not The End. When Jesus Returns To Judge The Living And Dead He Will Give To All Who Have Trusted In Him Eternal Life In A New World Where Sin And Death Will Be No More.....Jesus Christ Gives Us Faith, Hope And Love...Yes....Christmas Changes Everything. Christmas Gives Us A New Perspective On Both Life And Death....And It Is His Church, The Christian Church, That Brings The Faith, Hope And Love Of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: This World Has Many Problems. It Always Has....And It Always Will....And We Have Problems Too. But It Could Be Worse. How So? It Could Be A World Without Christmas, Without Jesus Christ, Without The Forgiveness Of Sins. A World Without Peace With God And Without The Hope Of The Resurrection From The Dead To A New Life And World...And A World Without The Christian

Church. At One Point In The Movie "It's A Wonderful Life" The Guardian Angel, Clarence Tells George Bailey: "One Man's Life Touches So Many Others, When He's Not There It Leaves An Awfully Big Hole." And So It Is With Jesus Christ.....If There Is No Jesus Christ.... It Leaves An Awfully Big Hole. .His Life Has Touched So Many Others, Only God Knows How Many. There Is A **Christmas**...And A **Good Friday** And An **Easter**.....And A **Christian Church**. And So... Whatever Problems You Might Have..... You Really Do Have....."A Wonderful Life" The Life That Jesus Christ Was Born To Give You....In This World...And In The One To Come.....And That Is Why....I Can Say To You Once Again....."Merry Christmas"! (Congregation). **Amen.**