

“Another Christmas Story.”

I remember the first time I saw the movie “A Christmas Story.” I stumbled on it while flipping channels one Christmas Eve. The movie 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 In 1986, the year I first saw “A Christmas Story,” the optimism and naiveté of Postwar America had been replaced by post-Vietnam suspicion and cynicism and the self-absorbed Me Generation. Ralphie’s simple longing for a Red Ryder BB gun had been replaced by Wall Street’s mantra “greed is good.”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, and when it has passed, they become the stuff of yellowed photographs and faulty memories. What’s more, it can never be recaptured.

For me the true Christmas, the one that we are celebrating today, 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 the movie and church side by side put into sharp relief the difference between Ralphie’s secular Christmas with all the cultural trappings of snow, parades, trees, and Santa and the true meaning of Christian. Somewhere along the line Christmas as the day of our Messiah’s birth is getting lost to the consumerism 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 today.

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.

Angelus Silesius—the messenger from Silesia—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.”

This wonderful invitation is given by God to each of us. 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 realized in the way we live. 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

The Rev. Eugene LeCouteur
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, VA

10:00 a.m.
December 25, 2024
Christmas Day, Year C

of love and salvation sent to us more than two thousand years ago, and again every year, through a little baby known as Jesus which means “God Saves” and as Emmanuel which means “God With Us.”

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