

## Practical Proverbial at Christmas, 4 December 2023. Today's topic: Love, Actually

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. Genesis 3:15*

We're gonna take a break from Matthew for December because, as Billy Mack said, "it's Christmas." "Love, Actually:" that movie is 20 years old this year. It's one of my wife's favorite Christmas movies and it poses a great question: why Christmas? In a world of seeming randomness, hate, and violence, why celebrate Christmas?

The idea of Christmas is a whole lot older than a 20-year-old movie. In fact, it's a whole lot older than even the 2000+ years since the original Christmas. The idea of Christmas goes all the way back to the beginning of human history, to the fall. You know the story: Adam and Eve. They're created by God and live a sinless life for awhile. We don't know how long "awhile" was; it could have been a day or it could have been much longer. Given they were human, it wouldn't surprise me if it were less than a day. No matter, they choose sin over God, choosing unknown doubt over known goodness. God confronts them and tries to bring them back to Him gently, and they both duck for cover.

That's when God puts the concept of Christmas into play. There and then, when the parents of humanity are (literally) caught naked in their sins, God promises to save them; to save all of us. He promises to crush Satan but deliver His very good creation: you and me (and Adam, Eve, and everyone else since). There and then, at the start of human history, God promises to personally intervene and save us because He knew then and before that we couldn't save ourselves.

Think about it: it was the very first Christmas gift. God gives us all the promise of saving us and He works through human rebellion and rage for the next forty centuries until the time is just right to completely fulfill that promise. He was patient and kind when we didn't deserve it, and He did it anyway. It was sort of like He wrapped up a giant Christmas gift and put it under a tree – maybe that tree from which they stole the fruit – then said, "open at the first Christmas."

Why would God do such a thing? Simple: it's love; it's love, actually.

Which, again, is a really great movie. Yeah, there's some bad language and raw adult themes and British quiriness but so go ahead and watch it. You're an adult and you aren't perfect; you can take it, and you're forgiven. Watch it, then go read the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, remembering that God set in motion His perfect plan for the birth of Jesus with two naked sinners at the moment of our fall.

For more reading: Isaiah 7:14

*Father, because of You love You gave us Christmas. You saved us...you saved me!*

## Practical Proverbial at Christmas, 5 December 2023. Today's topic: God With Us Still

*"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14*

Last time, we talked about how God set His plan for Christmas in motion at the moment of man's fall (because of love, actually). Today, we'll talk about how He gave people an undeniable sign of how He was sending Messiah and that we could know it was Him by that sign.

Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus. The prophet lived at the time of Assyrian invasion. Even in his day, he was recognized as a reliable prophet sent by God. Yet this business about a virgin? Virgins don't have kids. If they do, they aren't virgins! Yet the website, <https://jashow.org/articles/the-prophecies-of-christmas/>, says that, "Some have argued the word translated "virgin" in this verse refers merely to a "young woman." While the Hebrew word can be translated either way, the Greek translation of Isaiah, made long before the birth Jesus, uses a word specifically translated virgin. Those living in the time Isaiah was translated into Greek and in the time of Jesus understood this passage as referring to a person born of a virgin."

In Jesus' own time, two thousand years ago, people had long accepted Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would give birth to a child. A young woman who had never had sex, who had never consummated her marriage, would do something that, for humanity, would only be possible through sex. Our world trivializes sex, relegating it to dog-like "hookups," mere gratification. The Roman world of the first century encouraged this thinking.

But the Jews of Jesus' time understood that this would be something only God could do. Only God could make another human being without two human beings making love to initiate it. What's more, because God ordained that sex was to be only between married men and women, it would be miraculous for such a condition to actually occur. After all, one of the purposes of marriage is sex and its subsequent procreation.

Only God, who promised to deliver man from the sin we'd committed in Eden, could work over thousands of years to make things just so, to fulfill hundreds of prophecies in one and only one person who was conceived by divine power instead of human carnality. Only God could arrange things so that Mary, a committed, married virgin, and Joseph, a godly man of honor, would be ready when the first Christmas arrived. And they were. Among the many miracles done and fulfilled that Christmas night was Isaiah's word from seven centuries before. It was a word spoken in love to tell people that God would miraculously enter human life as "Immanuel," which means "God with us." God with us still.

For further reading: Matthew 1:18-22, Luke 1:34-37

*Lord, You spoke through Isaiah to tell people some of the miracles that would happen at Christmas. All praise and majesty are Yours.*

## **Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Matthew and Luke, 6 December 2023. Today's topic: His Spiritual Bloodline**

*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1:1*

Did you know that Jesus' maternal and paternal human genealogies go all the way back to God Himself? Now, you may be thinking, "duh!" But think about it. There is nobody else from antiquity whose entire genealogy is traceable all the way back to the very beginning of time. No pharaoh, no emperor, no philosopher, nobody.

Matthew 1 traces Jesus' paternal genealogy, through His adopted human father, Joseph of Nazareth, all the way back to Abraham. And Luke traces the Lord's human genealogy all the way back to creation, only this is also the blood line of Mary: Jesus' only direct blood relative. If Jesus was going to be fully human, He would have had parents, relatives, a full body, and a full spirit. He did. And, if Jesus was going to be fully God at the same time, He would have had only one direct human relative and a direct lineage to God. He did that, too.

Again, there's nobody else in all of antiquity whose family tree can be so accurately traced. No king of Israel, or Egypt; no ruler of ancient China, or Rome, or Babylon, or anywhere. And there's nobody else in all of human history whose parental lineage is like Jesus'.

Think about that in the context of the Nativity. Jesus' parents knew who He was; the angels had told them. And, perhaps, they knew who they were, too, knowing from whom they were descended because they had been told this all their lives. They hailed from patriarchs, from royalty, from historically notable people whose names we still know today (from reading some of the same Torah verses they had learned as children).

And yet there they were that first Christmas night: they who should be royalty, who should be attended by servants and acolytes and angels. They were dirt-poor and desperate. There they were in a barn: in a cold, drafty, dirty, smelly barn, full of animals and fodder and vermin and manure. He who was Christ the Lord deemed it perfect prophetic fulfillment to enter His world this way in the care of meager people whose ancestors were once 'somebodies.'

Did they realize that God made them more "somebody" than any of those ancestors who would one day be listed by Matthew and Luke? Did they fully grasp how they were witnessing the culmination of history in their newborn son, who was actually the Father's own Son? I suspect they were more caught up in simply making sure mother and child were safe and warm. But we know it, and we get to marvel at the Christmas wonder of it, knowing that, years later, the humbly-born King of creation would die and rise to adopt us into His own spiritual bloodline.

For further reading: Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-37

*Jesus, thank You, for being born, and living, and dying, to adopt me into Your family*

## Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Matthew, 7 December 2023. Today's topic: Joseph and Harvey

*"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17*

At this time of year, I think about Joseph. I like the take that "The Chosen" does with Joseph: a strong man, humble, foreign, adoring his beautiful young bride with wise eyes, but understanding that he's not the boy's real father. And I also like the take of the actor from the 1959 "Ben-Hur." When Jesus is grown, Joseph, the carpenter, acknowledges that his son has work to do in which Joseph has no part.

But the take I like most is that of Harvey Kimling, who was my maternal grandmother's adopted father. In 1905, Harvey and Mae Kimling adopted a little girl who, 24 years later, became my Mom's mom. 37 years after that, she became my maternal grandmother. That all happened because my maternal great grandfather, Harvey, adopted a lonely baby girl. At this time of year, I imagine Grandpa Kimling must have had some feelings similar to those of Joseph.

Now, my grandma wasn't Jesus (though she believed in Him). She wasn't born to save the world, but she saved the people around her through her faith and demeanor. She was the kindest person I've ever known, and she remained kind and caring despite living a tough life in the Depression, in marriage to a difficult and head-strong man, and in living in the knowledge that there was always part of her that didn't fit in. All that was possible because her father, Harvey James Kimling, took her into his own family. He wasn't her biological, blood father; he hadn't contributed to her conception. It wasn't something he HAD to do, even though he and his wife, Mae, desperately wanted children.

Today's verse was something God the Father said at Jesus' baptism. He affirmed to the whole world, in a clear, spoken voice, that Jesus is His Son, the Son He loved and in whom He was fully satisfied. This happened decades after that first Christmas in Bethlehem, yet, from the time before even then, Joseph understood that the son he would raise would not be his own blood. Joseph understood Jesus was God's Son because God's angel had told him so. After learning this, Joseph was personally impacted: his new marriage was put in question, and his family and friends would have talked, gossiped, ridiculed.

Yet Joseph stuck by Mary. He stuck with Jesus. When Jesus was born in that rude barn in Bethlehem, Joseph stayed. He stayed as an earthly father to parent a boy who needed a dad, as the man who would teach his son – his Savior – how to talk, act, work, treat others, to pray, to respect, and so much more. Joseph stayed to teach Jesus all the things a man needed to know, all the things a parent teaches a child. Just like my Great Grandpa Kimling.

For further reading: Micah 5:2-4

*Lord, thank You for adoptive parents, for men like Joseph, and Harvey.*

**Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Micah, 11 December 2023. Today's topic:  
Bethlehem Foretold**

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me, one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. Micah 5:2-4*

These verses are a direct prophecy saying that the eternal ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem. That's not insignificant because, at the time of Micah (over 700 years before Jesus), it had already been remembered for centuries that King David had come from Bethlehem. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, living around the same time, and living through the devastating Assyrian invasion. Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (the last two being contemporaries of Micah) also prophesied that Messiah would sit on David's throne and lead Israel forever. Messiah would be God, would be divine, would be the divine God come to earth as a man to reign over man as a man and God at the same time.

That settles it, right? Well, not if you don't believe. Not if you don't believe in this whole Jesus thing. But if you don't, why would you celebrate Christmas anyway? Bethlehem and Messiah wouldn't matter. Christmas literally means “day of Christ.” Why would someone want to celebrate Christmas if they didn't believe a day of Christ was real (and certainly not worth celebrating)?

You know why. The answer is as obvious as the warm feeling in your heart when you think about an adopted baby in the cold, being nestled by his new Mom and Dad. Even unbelievers feel love, though they really don't understand where it comes from. Even rejecters of Jesus want to know love and feel loved. Even people who reject Christ in Christmas want to enjoy the undeniable feelings of love at this time of year. And yet they refuse to believe.

Just yesterday, I was talking with my middle school class, and I challenged them to think of a Christmas without Christ; a celebration of winter, or feelings, or whatever, but without hope, without peace, without miracles, without faith. Sure, you could have family gather and friends and parties and tinsel and gifts, but they'd be mostly hollow and without meaning.

What's the point of Christmas without Christ? There is no point. No Jesus, no love, no miracles, not even a half-hearted “happy holidays.” Bah flippin humbug. Yet even the most uncaring of us still yearns to be loved...the way Jesus loves. The way it was shown in Bethlehem, which had been lovingly foretold from old.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 9:7

*Without you, Savior, there is no Christmas.*

## Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from 2 Corinthians, 12 December 2023. Today's topic: Jesus and Santa

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7.*

I wrote this a few years ago, but now's a good time to visit it again with a few updates. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're probably familiar with the annual "Jesus versus Santa" debate. You've seen the signs saying "Jesus is the reason for the season." For a long time I was one of the people exercised about the idea of Santa Claus crowding out the reality of Jesus. Santa seemed so secular, an Easter Bunny in a fluffy red hat. The magic of a fat Norseman slinking down a chimney to give away gifts seemed like a sweetly ominous distraction from the godhead becoming one with His creation to give us the gift of eternal love. I get it; I accept it, too. For years it created conflict in me, wanting to be a true believer in Jesus but not wanting to completely reject the seemingly subversive (disguised as harmless) concept of Santa. I mean, in our society, what kind of monster could reject Saint Nick, the venerated gift-giver to good little girls and boys?

Not this one. Yes, I'm a dirty sinner (like you, even like the real Saint Nicholas of Myra), but I came to the point of thinking there is no conflict, there is no harm, there's no sin in believing in Santa. I won't even offer the cautionary aside of reminding you of the differences between Jesus and Santa; I believe you get those on your own. Instead, if it is wrong to believe in Santa, explain to me how 2 Corinthians 9:7 doesn't perfectly line up with the idea of Santa. The story of Santa Claus is inseparable from the idea of cheerful giving. And the notion of being a cheerful giver is inseparable from 2 Corinthians 9:7. God is all about giving us gifts because He does it every day. He gives us the ultimate gift of free life symbolized by His incarnation in Bethlehem. He gives us the gift through the idea of sharing that loving life through the concept of a jolly old man wanting to simply love on perfect strangers.

Sure, Santa isn't a real person whereas Jesus Christ is. But God's love is real whether someone is fiction or not. God's love simply is, and God loves a cheerful giver. If Santa was a real person, I'd think God would love him for being that cheerful giver. Our world could use some more of that, so maybe sharing a little cheerfully giving Santa-love is really sharing the true love of Jesus. Ho ho ho and Merry Christmas, then, on behalf of the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

For further reading: Acts 20:35.

*Lord, thank You for the story of Santa Claus. Let this popular fable be a way we can give you praise and glory.*

## Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Acts, 13 December 2023. Today's topic: Saint Nick

*In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Acts 20:35*

In 21<sup>st</sup> century America, the most popular symbol of Christmas is Santa. But when you scratch off the red velvet and ring the jingle bells you see that the center of Santa is Christ. It's impossible to reach any other conclusion without rejecting the words of Acts 20.

Yet, historically speaking, our notion of Santa Claus always goes back to Saint Nicholas, the bishop of Myra (in Turkey), who lived only about 240 years after the time of Jesus. Nicholas is the patron saint of tradesmen, children, students, and many others. His life spanned persecution by the Romans to sitting on the council of Nicaea, which shaped the church we know.

Nicholas' true talent was giving. A legend has it that Nicholas gave a bag of gold to each of a poor man's three daughters because the father was too poor to afford a dowry. Some versions of the legend have him throwing the coins through a window, others down a chimney and landing in stockings. He gave to sailors; he gave to the poor. He devoted his life giving to others like Jesus would.

Over time, retelling this story morphed into the modern-day concept of Santa Claus. In the 1800 years since Nicholas died, his tradition has been compounded with that of Father Christmas (dating to Tudor England of the 1500s), Sinterklaas and Pere Noel in Europe, and Scandinavian Yule traditions. Here in America, Clement Moore's famous poem from the 1820s popularized the idea of Santa. So did advertising pictures from Harper's Bazaar and Coca Cola. And don't forget the popular editorial response which said, "yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

Giving is a projection of what we believe. Gifts are kind little mercies shared with others. Nicholas understood this when he spent his life giving to others. It's no surprise, then, that "jolly old Saint Nick" was based on a real Saint Nicholas. If you separated Santa Claus from giving, you wouldn't have Santa anymore. Santa gives to share, to make others better, to give things that others wouldn't otherwise receive. If the center of modern celebrations is Santa, then the center of Santa is selfless giving...like Nicholas...who lived to be like Jesus, apart from whom we do nothing. Apart from Jesus, Nicholas – or Santa – could give nothing. The next time you get worried that Santa is overtaking Jesus (as if that were possible), remember that the Santa-spirit of the holiday hailed from a real man named Nicholas, who lived his life giving to others. Like Jesus.

For further reading: Luke 2.

*Bless Saint Nicholas, Lord.*

## **Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Luke, 14 December 2023. Today's topic: The Christmas Story**

*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-8*

Have you ever realized that these verses are the only place in the Bible where the Christmas story is told? Matthew 2 contains the account of Joseph standing by Mary when she became pregnant, as well as the visit of the magi. And other books contain the prophecies about the coming Christ. But the record of Jesus' birth and the miraculous circumstances around it is found only here in Luke.

Knowing that, here's a partial list of things that we commonly, blessedly include in our Christmas celebrations: trees, carols, lights, big dinners, ugly sweaters, cookies, candies, decorations, red and green adornments, vacations, a national holiday, paper and ribbons, Scrooge and George Bailey (and maybe John McClane), programs and performances, parties, Santa, the Three Wise Men, Hallmark and SiriusXM channels with dedicated programming ad nauseum, snow, wassail, mountains of presents, shopping lists, cards, special postage, the North Pole, high-kicking Rockettes, and talking reindeer.

Did I miss anything? Now, I love Christmas. I love all of those things, and, like you, I involve many (maybe all of them) in my Christmas celebrations. I especially love family times and trees and cookies and the music. Much of my year is spent organizing times and events around the holidays. But know this: those things are NOT about Christmas. They're great and they mean a lot to me. But they aren't Christmas. Read those eight verses from Luke again. That's the only Christmas story. The rest of it is window-dressing (itself a Christmas tradition).

All those other things that I listed here can be good things. They reflect what the Wise Men did; they share little bits of Jesus in our own special ways. Celebrating with lights and sweaters and the rest shares our love for Jesus in small ways for the world to see. And they're good traditions of faith that are worthwhile to pass down to our descendants. But they're not the Christmas story (or "A Christmas Story."). If you want that, you have to go to Luke 2.

For more reading: Psalm 72:10-11

*Lord, thank You for the beautiful words of Luke that tell the story of Your birth.*



**Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Psalm 72, 18 December 2023. Today's topic:  
Those Gifts**

*The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. Psalm 72:10-11*

This psalm foreshadows what would be recorded in Matthew 2, where the account of the Magi is recorded. The psalm is attributed to Solomon, written at a time when he was the most powerful monarch on the planet. He had wisdom gifted to him by God; he had extravagant wealth; he was world-famous and the only superpower monarch on the planet. Other monarchs bowed before him and came to him for alliance, assistance, and advice.

And Solomon recognized that he was nothing compared to the living God who gave the life in which all this happened. What's more, Solomon, who sat on his father, David's, throne, saw that, one day, all the most powerful kings of the world would bow down before one greater than him. Fast forward many centuries and, at a humble home in the Levant, kings – "wise men" – would do exactly that. We commemorate that event every time we tell the story of the wise men at the boyhood home of Jesus Bar Joseph. Today, remember that the idea of giving gifts at Christmas, on the day of Christ, stems from that visit: a visit that was prophesied by the most powerful, wisest king in human history.

Kind of puts your Christmas shopping in a different light, doesn't it?

Every time you and I search frantically for something our special someone would like, we're falling in line with what Solomon predicted here. We're representing the kings from afar, and the wise men from Zoroastrian Persia, and all the people who gave gifts before us. We're showing a little Jesus-love by sharing something with others. Whether it's Tiffany's in a blue box, or a tin of homemade candy and cookies, gifts to others affirm our citizenship in the nations that shall serve Him both here and hereafter.

On Christmas morning, many of us will sit in our PJs, and someone will hand us a gift. Who knows who it's from; who knows what's inside. It's a gift; it's an expression of caring, whether it's heartfelt or a joke. And, in opening it, you and I are aligning ourselves with Jesus, accepting the love of others while, hopefully, transmitting more back.

Yet be advised, too, that doing so is only going to complicate things for you. Feelings and more become involved. When the southern kings gave gifts to Solomon, they allied with his nation, and made themselves political targets. When the wise men from the east presented gifts to the newborn King Jesus, they did so in defiance of Herod, the Jewish satrap who Rome appointed as ruler over a conquered people. And that resulted in wholesale murder, which we'll discuss more tomorrow.

For more reading: Matthew 2:1-12.

*Lord Jesus, all praise to You for the gifts of love and life You give*

## **Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Matthew 2, 19 December 2023. Today's topic: Billy Squier and the Magi**

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. Matthew 2:1-2*

You know this story, the story of the wise men. But do you know the lyrics to a Billy Squier song about Christmas? From 1981, "Christmas is the time to say "I love you." Share the joys of laughter and good cheer." Do you think that's how the wise men felt? Did they feel love, laughter and cheer? I bet those were the furthest things from their minds. Instead, I bet they felt anxiety, amazement, questioning, determination, and wonder we can't fully grasp. Before it was all done, I bet they also felt horror, even some regret.

Their scientific faith had led them hundreds of miles from home. They had seen signs in the heavens and knew enough of Jewish faith to know the signs heralded the Messiah. The wise professors set out on a long journey, to a faraway land (probably Judea), unaware of the risks they would encounter. Those risks became all too real when they first went to meet Herod the Great, the Jewish satrap who Rome had appointed to govern Judea in their stead.

Herod didn't get to be "the Great" without reason. He had restored the Second Temple, enlarging and embellishing it to make it more splendid than Solomon's original temple. According to Wikipedia, he willingly enforced the wishes of Caesar, having been a close friend of Julius Caesar, then Marc Antony, then Octavian/Caesar Augustus. He ruthlessly rid Israel of crime; he undertook expansive building projects; he formed a Herodian aristocracy and dynasty out of nothing. Herod even executed members of his own family who were threats to his hold on power, including his wife.

And, on learning from the Wise Men that the Messiah had been born in his kingdom, Herod lied to the visiting professors. He told them he wished to worship the baby, too, yet his actions soon after proved otherwise. Read on in Matthew 2 and you learn that, when the Wise Men didn't return to him with news, Herod had every boy in the area, aged 2 and under, murdered.

Billy Squier had a point: Christmas is indeed a time to say "I love you;" we crave and need it. But perhaps it also needs to be a remembrance of one of the darkest deeds in history. This Christmas, look at a Nativity scene, or statues of the wise men, and, especially if you've never done it before, say a prayer for the souls of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of blameless young boys murdered in the paranoia of a stand-in king.

For more reading: Matthew 2:13-15.

*Lord, thank You for the poignant story of the Magi. Bless all the young innocents who were taken.*

## **Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Romans 12, 20 December 2023. Today's topic: A Gift**

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2*

Earlier this week, while driving rideshare, I received a special Christmas gift. Late at night, I picked up an old man at a hospital emergency room. He was sitting there, outside in the cold in a wheelchair; when I pulled up, a nurse quickly came out to help him. His name was Thomas, and he was 70 years old. To be honest, he looked much older and very sick.

The ride wasn't far, and we made small talk; that's what you usually do on a rideshare. When we stopped at his apartment, I asked him if he was a first or second floor resident, because there were outside stairs to the second floor and it was dark. He said he lived on the second, and when I asked him if he needed help getting up there, he said, "no, I've got it." I wished him a good night and offered him some cookies; this season, I'm giving out free cookies to my riders. He thanked me and responded, "no, I have a feeding tube and if I try to swallow food I'll choke." He joked that, "you wouldn't want my death on your conscience," and I laughed back to him, "no sir, I wouldn't."

Then Thomas leveled me. He thanked me for driving and said, "you're a nice guy. You've been kind. I have cancer and they just told me that, if I do a little exercise, I have only about 2 weeks to live." He thanked me again, and ambled over to the stair way.

I should have gone over to help him up the stairs; I should have offered to have him spend Christmas in Gainesville, with us. I should have asked him what else I could do to help so that he wouldn't be alone. Instead, my eyes filled with tears and I just drove away to my next ride.

You and me, all of us human beings here on the Third Rock, desperately need Christmas. We need love; we need peace; we need to know God cares and keeps His promises. We need the hope offered through commemorating the humble birth of Jesus. We need these because we become unkind knowing that cruel death threatens every moment.

Then I meet someone like Thomas. I realized he wasn't alone, and that Jesus was there in that moment, loving on him, and showing me some mercy as well. This will probably be the last of many Christmases for this man. One of his last gifts was one he didn't know he gave. His story of living and dying is a kind Christmas gift from the will of God.

For more reading: Luke 23:44-46

*Father, have mercy on Thomas. Guide him back to you with love, peace, and no pain.*

## **Practical Proverbial at Christmas, from Luke 23, 21 December 2023. Today's topic: The Best Christmas Movie**

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:44-46*

After talking about why we need Christmas, to finish the year, let's talk about why Christmas happened.

Controversial opinion: the best Christmas movie is Mel Gibson's, "The Passion of the Christ." Put "The Passion" in your Christmas viewing list right there with Charlie Brown and all your other family favorites. I think that the most "Christmasy" scene is the one where the Roman soldiers flog Jesus so severely that the skin rips off His back. That, and that scene where He's dying on the cross, and the agony on his face is so apparent, so painful, so real.

I think "The Passion of the Christ" is the perfect Christmas movie because that immoral killing on Calvary is why Christmas really happened. It's why we celebrate the Nativity. It's why the stories of the shepherds and the wise men were recorded. The gory, excruciating death of the sweet baby Jesus was set in motion on that first Christmas night. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill towards men. The angels said that because God's glory, peace, and goodwill to men would one day be shown on the cross.

Then came Easter. Watch "The Passion" again; watch the very last scene. You know the one, where the stone is rolled away, and the very much alive Jesus rises and walks out of that tomb. THAT is the completion of what started at Christmas. Death was the path Jesus had to walk to get to the reason for the season, which is eternal life with Christ the Lord.

We all walk that path; you and me, unless Jesus returns first, we will die. Because He rose from it, death is only a moment in time. It's only a short walk through an unknown door into something more beautiful than what we know here. On the other side is Jesus, and Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and Magi. On the other side are love and loved ones. On the other side is everything we hoped for and more than we can imagine. Christmas started what Easter completes. Thank God for His glory and mercy and Christmas...and Easter.

Merry Christmas! Now, look forward to Easter. In a few days, we'll all take down our decorations and resume our pre-holiday lives. That's when the world of "The Passion" becomes the norm again as we get back to dog-eat-dog; thanks, Mel, for the reminder. Say an end-of-year prayer that the baby of Bethlehem grew into the man on Calvary who opened eternity for us all.

For more reading: Mathew 10:37

*Lord, praise, thanks, and love to You for coming at Christmas...and back at Easter*