

Evotional

Sermon title: “Miracle on 34th Street.”

Bible passage: Isaiah 7:14-17 & Luke 1:26-38.

Speaker: Neil Durling.

Date: 1.12.13.

Message:

Miracle on 34th Street is a film about a nice old man who claims to be Santa Claus and is institutionalized as insane. But a young lawyer decides to defend him by arguing in court that he is the real thing. Here’s some **background** (on the original version!):

- Despite the fact that the film is set during Christmas, studio head Darryl F. Zanuck insisted that it be released in May because he argued that more people went to the movies during the summer. So the studio began scrambling to promote it while keeping the fact that it was a Christmas movie a secret.
- It received a 'B' rating (morally objectionable in part) from the highly influential Catholic Legion of Decency because Maureen O'Hara played a divorcée. This made me think... What rating would films get today if judged by the moral lives of those involved in them? Also, I'm glad God doesn't hold things over us for the rest of our lives like the Catholic Legion of Decency!
- According to Natalie Wood's biographer, during the shoot, the young actress was convinced that Edmund Gwenn was actually Santa Claus (by all accounts, Gwenn was a very good-natured man on the set). It wasn't until Wood saw him out of costume at the wrap party that she realized he wasn't Santa.

The whole film revolves around wondering if Kris Kringle is the real deal. The Jewish people were watching and wondering for God's chosen Messiah to come. Who would be the real deal? The Old Testament is littered with prophecies. Here's just one of them...

Isaiah 7:14-17: Who is the mother? Who is the baby? A surface reading places Mary and Jesus as the answer. But, to my annoyance (!), it's a bit more complicated than that. There are five main views:

1. The mother is royal, perhaps the queen (Ahaz' wife), and so the child is a royal prince, perhaps Hezekiah.
2. The mother is Isaiah's wife, and so the child is one of his sons.
3. It doesn't refer to specific mother and son but to mothers in Judah generally who will give their offspring name symbolizing hope in God.
4. The mother is Mary and the child Jesus.
5. The mother is a royal contemporary of the prophet, whose child's name would symbolize the presence of God with his people and who would foreshadow the Messiah in whom God would be incarnate.

So what's the answer? Well... The Queen and Isaiah's wife weren't virgins and they were married – there's no clear use in the Old Testament of *almah* (virgin/young woman) for a married woman. This word is consistently used to designate a sexually mature, but unmarried woman. Therefore, in their day, she would have been a virgin. That knocks out options 1 and 2. Also, such a specific prophecy would not be used so vaguely for everyone. Nope to number 3. And, the historical specifics cannot simply link it to Jesus. So it is no to number 4 as well.

Therefore, 5 seems the best option. I picture a woman naming her child in faith that one day God would send his Messiah to his people, she points forward to Jesus and Mary. This is a link that Matthew makes explicitly and Luke makes narratively (**Luke 1:26-38**).

Just as *Miracle on 34th Street* swirls around the question of who Kris Kringle is the Bible swirls around the question of who the Messiah will be and if it can really be this babe in a manger. We believe he is. Jesus is the hope of the world.

The film's tagline is: Capture the spirit of Christmas with this timeless classic! Our church Lego Nativity has definitely done this. It has captured the simple story for Reception classes at local schools, The Sevenoaks Chronicle, several national newspapers, numerous Facebook pages, a Swedish Designer and several Twitter feeds around the globe. Long may it continue to be a vehicle through which Jesus is lifted high.

Friend's, let's be captured by the spirit of Christmas in our homes through the timeless classic Jesus!

Questions:

1. Is there anything in your life that you feel is held over you by “The Catholic Legion of Decency” (as it were). Why not take a moment to come, in your imagination to the foot of the cross and leave it with the one who disposes of the past sins and hurts.
2. Natalie Wood thought Edmund Gwenn was Father Christmas. What about you makes people mistake you for Jesus?
3. Have you ever placed your hope in God in a hopeless situation (like the woman who names her son looking towards Jesus)?
4. Think of a specific person yet-to-be Christian. Got them? They ask: “Who is Jesus to you?” How would you answer?
5. Please share some ways you capture the spirit of Christmas in your home through the timeless classic Jesus.

Prayer:

Father God, please help me to capture the spirit of Christmas through Jesus. Amen.