

He Will Save His People: Luke 2:1-20

Norwalk Christian Church, December 24, 2015, Year C

For the first time in 38 years, there will be a full moon tomorrow on Christmas Day. The first time in my lifetime. The last time we had a full moon on Christmas Day was 1977, which, by the way, was the same year the first Star Wars movie hit theaters.

Appropriate, since a new Star Wars movie is in theaters this Christmas. If you're like our family, you spent Advent preparing, yes, for the coming of Christ, but also for the coming of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. We rewatched all the old movies as we introducing the kids to the story and the characters we have loved our whole lives.

Now, I promise, no spoilers tonight. Well, not of the new movie. If you haven't seen the original Star Wars movies or read the Gospel of Luke, you've had time enough. During this time of year, we reflect back on old stories, prophecies foretold, stables, shepherds and wise men. But this year, there were also droids and jedi, princesses and wookies. King Herod AND Darth Vader. Emperor Palpatine and Emperor Augustus.

If Star Wars is not your thing, the themes are almost universal in our culture these days. Be it wizards and witches from Hogwarts, Avengers, Hobbits or the apocalyptic remnants fighting the latest end time catastrophe. Different trappings, but the story is virtually the same. The battle of good versus evil. Light versus dark.

There's always a hero; a Savior. Someone, perhaps unlikely, but always powerful. The stakes are high, but they always triumph in grand, magnificent ways. Battles to the death. Total destruction. The hero, leading the charge towards victory over the darkness. Salvation.

After watching the Star Wars movies again this time of year, it's hard not to read their themes into the Christmas Story, tonight. After all, it is a story of salvation, that happened a long time ago, in a place that seems so very, very far away.

Sometimes, it's easier to live in these fantasy worlds far away, where good always triumphs over the evil, than it is to face reality. Reality can be scarier and more unpredictable than the evil portrayed in the latest blockbuster.

Who knows when a troubled man with a gun will walk into your workplace. Will our city be the next to be attacked? On the news we watch pictures of the worst refugee crisis since World War 2, and it seems almost a scene from a dystopian novel, people fleeing for their lives from an evil almost too horrible to be true.

The dark side? We know the dark side.

Sometimes it's far, far away, but sometimes it's right here. Violence. Hate. Abuse. Hopelessness. Right in our homes. Right in our heart.

We sing tonight of salvation, of Joy coming into the world, of Peace on Earth and Mercy mild, yet so much seems unreconciled, so much left undone.

Had we the force to obliterate the evil we loathe so much, we would, in a heartbeat. Had we an army large enough to decimate the powers of darkness once and for all, we would not hesitate.

But what *do* we have?

Were George Lucas or J.J. Abrams directing the Christmas Story, things would surely look different. Instead of Mary and Joseph we'd have a Princess and a Jedi Knight, surrounded in a palace by senators and generals, not scared shepherds. The stakes would still be high, but the whole world would be rooting on our hero, as he fought to save his people.

But what do *we* have? A baby? Shepherds? Angels--now we're talking--but organized, not as an army, but as a choir. There's no room in the inn. No dignitaries. They don't even have a home.

Is it enough?

From this humble birth, a hero can still arise, build an army, amass the great power against unbelievable odds, and save the day. But that's not where this story goes.

He will soon gather fishermen, not warriors. He will refuse military power when offered. He will teach love and peace. His friends will be lepers and prostitutes. He will party with the outcasts, and get cast out of his own hometown.

Don't get me wrong, he will have great power, and yet he will use that power, not to obliterate the evil, but to heal a man born blind and to raise to life the dead daughter of a general in the Imperial army.

Love your enemies, is what he teaches. Pray for those who persecute you. Blessed are the poor. I have come, not for the healthy, but for the sick. Who is he, that he eats with tax collectors and sinners?

He doesn't travel the galaxy. He barely leaves his home town. And instead of destroying the enemy, he is killed by the enemy, as if this was the plan all along.

No, this is hero is unlike any that Hollywood has ever dreamt up. But this isn't Hollywood's story. This is God's story.

It's not that God can't come up with a good story, it's just that God had more in mind than entertainment. Seeing our darkness, how hard it is for us to find our way, and how our confusion and insecurity can often lead us to do horrible things to ourselves and to one another, God decided to do something. To get involved. Personally.

Instead of sending a hero, God became one...one of us. God, putting on flesh, born as a baby. Not to terrify or punish, but to show us that we are beloved by the very maker of the Universe. And no matter the darkness we may experience here, there is a light of love that will always overcome the darkness.

That's why God showed up, not in the palace, but in the darkness of the stable in Bethlehem. Not to princesses and Jedi masters, but to a young, unmarried woman and her terrified fiancé. Because, in God's story, no great heroes are needed; special powers and training are not required. You don't even have to know what you're doing.

In God's story, anyone and everyone can give birth to salvation.

This is God's plan for saving the world. It doesn't all depend on one hero, but on each one of us, and all of us, joining with God in birthing salvation. Every time we say yes to love, overcoming the hate, salvation is born. Every time we refuse to let prejudice and fear get the best of us, salvation is born. Every time we renounce the violence of our world, salvation is born.

The miracle we are waiting for, the hope for which we long, isn't out there, but it's in here. In a thousand different ways, through the lives of thousands and thousands of different people, salvation is born. With us. In us. God in the flesh. God in *our* flesh.

The angels are singing in your sky tonight: "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing *you* good news of great joy for all the people." For all people, yes. But also for *you*.

Will *you* go to Bethlehem and see? Will you see Mary and Joseph, and that baby lying in a manger. And seeing this love, can you ever be the same?

Jesus, is his name. He will save his people. And the path he walked is our path to follow.

Fall on your knees. Oh hear, the angel's voices.
They're calling to you. To us all.

He will save his people.
He is saving his people.
He is saving his people through us.

We are the hope of the world. And with God, we are enough.