



December 24, 2018
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Reel Christmas: The Search

Luke 2:15-20

Poor Charlie Brown. His friends can be so mean! Like that little girl: "...do something right for a change, Charlie Brown!" That's not nice! Especially because Charlie Brown already feels so bad. He is depressed because everyone has forgotten the real meaning of Christmas; they think Christmas is all about buying presents. And that makes him sad.

SO, to cheer him up, Lucy sends him to find a Christmas tree. But do you remember the kind of tree she wants? A big aluminum tree...and what color? Pink. Yuch. Let's watch. The tree lot was FILLED with aluminum trees... of every color. Pink and yellow and red. But Charlie Brown picks the scrawniest tree on the lot. Why? Because it was real! As unimpressive as it seemed on the outside, it was the only real tree. Charlie Brown was searching for the real thing, wasn't he?

On the very first Christmas night, there were people on a search of their own. And like Charlie Brown, they weren't very popular. In fact, the rest of the town looked down on them. They were dirty... and poor ...and most people thought they were thieves who would steal from you if they had a chance. Who am I talking about? The shepherds. Shepherds had a horrible reputation... and they would be the LAST people you'd expect to have a visit from an angel with important news.

But as you heard from our kids in the video, that's exactly what happened. It was the middle of the night. They were half asleep and bored out of their minds watching their stupid sheep. And suddenly, the sky was filled with light because an angel appeared and told them incredible news: a baby had been born in Bethlehem...a baby sent by God who would grow up to be the most important person who ever lived. Who was that baby?

That would have been pretty scary. But also, exciting! After all, life was hard for shepherds. They lived outside. They didn't have showers. They were always stinky. In fact, the townspeople hated when they came into their shops because they smelled so bad. Shepherds were the Charlie Browns of their time. They were the losers. The outcasts. Their life was hard and dull and they probably felt as sad as Charlie Brown about how people treated them; like big nothings. Has anyone ever treated you that way?

But that night, they were the MOST important people in Bethlehem. Because the angel came to THEM...imagine that!...with an incredible announcement about the birth of a baby who would be the savior of the world. It was like a treasure hunt. The angel gave them clues about how to find this little baby in the middle of town. He said, "Go to Bethlehem and look for a barn...and then look for a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in cow's feed box." How yucky would THAT be! Have you ever seen how slobbery a cow is? After they heard what the angels said, this is what happened.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them

in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The shepherds were supposed to go on a treasure hunt, weren't they? If I told you there is a treasure hidden somewhere in this room, how many kids would want to find it? Well, there is. Who wants to look? Look for the biggest Christmas tree and then look for a gift bag underneath. Open it. What is it?

Do you see how excited he/she was? He couldn't wait to find the treasure. But what if he had said, "Mehhhh...I'm not interested. I don't want to put in the effort. I'll just sit right here." What would happen? He would miss out on free Menchie's! And the rest of us would say, "Are you crazy! Why wouldn't you at least LOOK at the treasure before you decide whether you want it or not?"

Can you imagine if the shepherds did that? What if the angel appeared in heaven...filled the sky with light and song... told them this incredible news... gave them directions... and the shepherds said...: "Mmmehh! That was fun. Exciting. But it's dark.... and baby, it's cold outside...and it's a mile to Bethlehem. I don't want to go looking for some baby in the middle of the night. I can't be bothered." What if the shepherds just laid back down and went to sleep?

Crazy right? We'd say, "Look what you missed! Look what you passed up! You had a chance to discover the greatest treasure the world ever received...God's own son. That discovery could change your life. It would give you purpose like you've never had before. A story to tell the rest of the world! The story that God loves us...and wants a relationship with us!" How could you miss out on that?

But they didn't miss out, did they! They went to Bethlehem. And afterwards, we read that they "...returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen..." In other words, their lives would never be the same. All because they were willing to go and search out the truth of what they had been told.

So here's the deal: every Christmas Eve...every year...in every service... thousands of the people gather in this room to hear the message of the angels. Every Christmas Eve we read scripture and sing songs and light candles...and declare... again... that God sent the most incredible gift to the world. The gift of his own Son. He came in a modest package. Like the Charlie Brown tree, it wasn't impressive at all. Not on the outside.

BUT...it was real. In fact, it is the MOST real thing about Christmas. This child born in such unassuming conditions to such unremarkable parents and welcomed by such unimpressive guests...this child is our savior. Your savior...if you'll have him.

Every Christmas, we proclaim this same message. Jesus is born! And he wants to be born into your life! The Lord...the Savior of the world... loves YOU and wants a relationship with YOU. He will change you. He will give you purpose and joy like you've never known. But there is a part God wants YOU to play. He asks you to seek him! To search for what is REAL about Christmas. To seek Jesus! Maybe seeking means praying the first real prayer of your life. Maybe seeking for you means being baptized. Maybe seeking is having the courage to attend Alpha and find answers to questions that have always troubled you. Or maybe seeking is coming back to hear me teach from the gospel of Mark. I'm calling it "Instagram Jesus" because Mark is packed with photographs of the most amazing person who ever lived.

Anyhow, the gift is here...the treasure is here...the invitation is here. SO...what will you do with it? If the Bible told us that the shepherds laid back down and went to sleep ...we would be so disappointed. And probably shocked that they could sleep after such an encounter. Yet, for many this evening, after hearing the greatest news the world has ever heard, you will go back home... and go back to sleep, spiritually...until Christmas rolls around again next year.

But what if this Christmas Eve was the start of YOUR search? A year ago, a young man walked into this service. He accepted our challenge and came to Alpha, even though he was nervous and suspicious. And then, he kept coming. And last week, I met him for coffee...and he told me that this last year at Chapel Hill has "transformed his life." His words. Maybe YOUR search begins this evening...the search...for the REAL meaning of Christmas. I promise...it will transform YOUR life, too!