

Hope

“Miracle on 34th Street”

Daily Readings & Study

November 30-December 4

Monday: Hebrews 11:1-6

How would you define “faith”? Have others ever challenged your faith, or been belittled because you believe? In *Miracle on 34th Street*, Kris Kringle said, *“If you can't accept anything on faith, then you're doomed for a life dominated by doubt.”* What do you think this means? How can we “see” beyond our five senses to God’s unseen realities?

Tuesday: Isaiah 9:2-7

What are these verses speaking of? Why would Isaiah have offered this to the ancient Hebrew people? Does it make sense that they would have believed something so hopeful and intangible?

Fred Gailey, in *Miracle on 34th Street*, told the sternly “realistic” Doris, *“Those lovely intangibles...are the only things that are worthwhile.”* Can you even imagine life without “lovely intangibles” like hope, beauty, purpose, delight, compassion or love? To what extent do you agree with Fred’s sweeping statement that they are *“the only things that are worthwhile”*? Why does the Bible so often link God with the idea of light?

Wednesday: Luke 1:5-20

Zechariah couldn’t quite believe this incredible prophecy, even though an angel of God was delivering it. Sometimes, things seem just too incredible, childish and foolish to believe. Have you ever been tempted to see faith as childish and foolish? What people of faith have you known who were anything but

childish and foolish? How would you describe these people?
How does their faith inspire our faith?

Thursday: Luke 1:26-38

Do you believe that "*nothing is impossible with God*" (Lk 1:37, Mt 19:26)? Do you believe that miracles can still occur, or are miracles a thing of the past? Why or why not? What kinds of impossibilities might people be wrestling with today that should be trustingly left in God's hands?

Friday: Luke 1:39-45

Do you think that we, like Elizabeth and Mary, are blessed simply because we "*believe*"? Before Jesus was even born, Elizabeth was the first person recorded as calling him "*Lord*". What does this term, "*Lord*" mean or imply to you? In what ways has Jesus been the "*Lord*" of your life?

MOVING FORWARD

We are called to be like Kris Kringle today; those who represents the Christ Child proclaiming hope. As we approach Christmas we look at ways we can be Christ's presence for other people. This week, honor the beginning of the Advent season by committing to some form of community service in Christ's name.

Peace

“How the Grinch Stole Christmas!”

Daily Readings & Study

December 7-11

Monday: Romans 7:14-25, 1 John 1:8-2:2

In the Grinch, Dr. Seuss created a character that reminds us that there is evil in our world, and in each of our own hearts. The Grinch is fun, but evil is serious business. When Paul said evil came from “*sin that lives in me*” (verse 17), he wasn’t trying to duck responsibility for his actions. It was a vivid way to depict a common human experience: the sense of an inner war, of two opposing *natures (our sinful nature and our new nature in Christ)*. How do those two natures struggle within you?

Tuesday: Mark 7:14-23

Dr. Seuss said the Grinch most likely hated Christmas because “*his heart was two sizes too small.*” Jesus agreed. Jesus said it’s not what goes into a person’s body that is bad; it is what comes from within a person. God covers us with grace, and the Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives. Sometimes however, our sinful nature gets in the way of God’s transformation of our hearts and lives. What gifts has God given us in His transformation of our lives? How can we daily encourage each other in our daily walk? Do you have a trusted brother or sister in Christ to help encourage you and keep you accountable?

Wednesday: Luke 1:57-75

There were no presents, no trees—but no matter. The Whos still welcomed Christmas with a song of joy. They showed the same spirit as Luke’s Christmas story, which was full of songs. Zechariah rejoiced that his newborn son would prepare the

way for someone else, someone greater. When have you been able to set aside your ambitions for yourself or your children to further God's larger purposes?

Thursday: Luke 6:27-36

Jesus taught his followers how to live with his peace and joy. As the Whos sang in the Dr. Seuss story, *"Christmas Day is in our grasp so long as we have hands to clasp ... Welcome, Christmas, while we stand heart to heart, and hand in hand."* Luke linked the Golden Rule (*"Do to others as you would have them do to you."*—verse 31) to Jesus' words about how to treat enemies. In what relationships do you find it hardest for you to treat others as you'd wish to be treated?

Friday: Romans 12:14-21

When the Grinch heard a glad sound, rather than a sad one, he was puzzled. Then he had a new thought, wrote Dr. Seuss. *"'Maybe Christmas,' he thought, 'doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more.'"* In what ways do Paul's words remind you of the true meaning of Christmas? Can you identify one way you'll honor Christmas differently, to better live out Paul's counsel?

MOVING FORWARD

How the Grinch Stole Christmas sets up a contrast between the Grinch and the Whos. The Grinch was bitter, resentful and angry. The Who's show kindness, mercy and forgiveness on a regular basis. The Grinch lives in every one of our hearts and so do the Whos. Which one will you feed and which one will you starve? This week pray for someone who you feel resentment toward. Ask God to help you let go of the pain and to bless that person.

Joy

“It’s a Wonderful Life”

Daily Readings & Study

December 14-18

Monday: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

George Bailey contrasted his father’s life and “wealth” with Mr. Potter’s, saying, *“Well, in my book he died a much richer man than you’ll ever be!”* Potter was wealthy, but he attained his wealth at the expense of others. George’s father and George lived lives full of ups and downs, helping and serving others. When we view life in the light of eternity, George was right. Do you find an eternal perspective encouraging, or do you find it frustrating?

Tuesday: Luke 12:22-34

In the film, George Bailey cried, *“You sit around here and spin your little webs and you think the whole world revolves around you and your money! Well, it doesn’t, Mr. Potter!”* Today, as when Frank Capra made *It’s a Wonderful Life*, headlines often suggest that the whole world DOES revolve around money, and the power of people who have lots of it. What measures do you use to evaluate your own and others’ significance? Are your measures closer to Mr. Potter’s, or the ones Jesus suggested in Luke 12?

Wednesday: Proverbs 14:31, 31:8-9, Psalm 82:1-4

Mr. Potter referred to people like Ernie Bishop as *“discontented, lazy rabble.”* To which George responded, *“Just remember this, Mr. Potter—this rabble you’re talking about, they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath?”* Do you ever have opportunities to speak up, to defend the poor

and the voiceless? Are you willing to use them? How might God's Word in Proverbs and Psalms help you with that?

Thursday: Acts 5:17–20; 12:1–11; 27:21-26

In *It's a Wonderful Life*, we meet a charming, unusual character: "*Clarence Odbody, Angel second class.*" Clarence gets a very serious task: to help George see his life's value clearly, so that he doesn't give up. What's interesting is that, without the theatrical touches, things like that really happen. Acts records at least three key times when divine messengers freed or saved an apostle facing prison or death. When has an angel, human or otherwise, turned your life from going down into darkness and toward God's light?

Friday: John 10:7-15

Jesus said he came "*so that they could live life to the fullest.*" Sometimes we picture a life lived according to God's principles as dreary, dutiful, devoid of joy. That's how it began to seem to George Bailey, until Clarence showed him what his town would be like if he had never lived. In Clarence's words, "*Each man's life touches so many other lives ... You see, George, you've really had a wonderful life*" — the kind of "life to the fullest" Jesus promised. What voices have played the biggest role in lifting your vision above the empty promises of materialism?

MOVING FORWARD

George Bailey felt like his entire world was crashing down on him when his uncle misplaced an \$8,000 deposit. George was contemplating suicide until his guardian angel help change his perspective on life by showing him what the world would have been like had he never been born. Every single one of us has an impact that we can't imagine. This week identify as many things as possible that have made your life wonderful.

Love

"Elf"

Daily Readings & Study

December 21-25

Monday: John 1:1-5, 11-18

When Buddy the Elf heard that Santa was coming to Gimbels, he said excitedly, *"I know him! I know him!"* In a more serious, cosmic vein, John's gospel took up the same theme, saying, *"No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known."* In what ways does Jesus, God in flesh, show you more clearly what God is like?

Tuesday: Luke 2:8-20

The "Code of Elves" said, *"The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear."* The heavenly assembly praised God to the lowly shepherds, whose hearts were open to hear their message. Imagine yourself hearing these familiar words for the first time, as the shepherds did. Heard that way, is this message joyous news for you? What are your reasons for your answer? Who else in your life might need to hear joyous news?

Wednesday: Mark 10:13-16

The character Buddy the Elf is appealing in part because he has an innocent, child-like quality. At one point in Elf he said, *"I just like smiling; smiling's my favorite."* Jesus must have liked smiling, too. Mark said he hushed his stern, overly "grown up" disciples, and *"hugged the children and blessed them."* Jesus said, *"Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in."* What can you learn from children that will deepen and enrich your relationship with God?

Thursday: Galatians 5:22-23 (Christmas Eve)

The Code of Elves said, “*There’s Room for everyone on the Nice list,*” and that was the apostle’s message, too. The fruit of the Spirit isn’t just for a few select saints. All who are in Christ, have God’s Spirit may have those fruit. The year 2021 starts next Friday. How will you cultivate the soil of your life in the new year so that the Spirit’s fruit can grow more deeply? In whom, and in what ways will you help plant or cultivate the Spirit’s fruit in others around you this year?

Friday: Luke 2:1-7 (Christmas Day)

This morning we examine the movie “*A Christmas Carol*” at our Christmas Morning service. In the movie, Scrooge is quite selfish. However, toward the end, he learns how to be more Christ-like as a kind and giving person. Many of us created lists of gifts we hoped to receive at Christmas. This year as you look ahead to the New Year, create a list of intangible gifts you can give others. Then think of ways to share the blessings God has given you with others and experience the true meaning of Christmas.

MOVING FORWARD

In the movie Elf, the “*Code of Elves*” says 1) *there is room for everyone on the nice list*, 2) *treat every day like Christmas*, 3) *the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear*. When we live out the code of the elves we are actually being the light of the world. When God’s light shines in our lives (*Jn 1:1-14*) and we shine like the stars (*Phil 2:14-16*), things start to change. This week find a way to spread Christmas cheer and be the light of the world.