

John 1:1-14

What is the meaning of Christmas? I've been pondering this basic question more this year, ever since my kids and I had a lively discussion about it after reading a wonderful children's book about the generous life of Saint Nicholas and the hard choices we sometimes have to make in order to love other people. I noticed though, how confusing it is for my younger kids – they zero in on Santa and gifts, predictably, more than anything, despite all our talk about baby Jesus and his birthday. Indeed, my kids have spent A LOT of time putting together their online Christmas wish lists.

On top of that, I worry that what happened to Mason's mother may happen to me. A young boy - Mason walked up to his mom just before Christmas and said, "Mom, you can delete the train set from my Christmas wish list." His mother asked, "Why is that?" And he answered, "Yesterday I found one in the closet."

But yes – the meaning of Christmas...it so easy to lose sight of this in our culture but it's a wonderful concept to ponder. In the beloved Charlie Brown Christmas special, Charlie Brown gets frustrated and depressed and cries out, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" And then we hear what has become, arguably, the most famous Christmas sermon ever as, Linus recites the Biblical story of Jesus' birth from the Gospel according to Luke. Linus responds to Charlie Brown's question saying he can tell him the meaning of Christmas. I remember the first time I saw the special as a little girl – and the quiet hush of that moment on screen as Linus takes the stage and then tells the story so succinctly: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not . . . for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Linus continues and then ends his speech with, "That Charlie Brown is what Christmas is all about." The special was produced in 1965 but at the time the CBS executives actually hated what Charles Schultz had put together...they even considered scrapping it completely. There was fear that including the Biblical passage itself would upset and alienate viewers. But, Charles Schulz insisted they keep it and he said, "If we don't do it, who will?" Then, after the show's sponsor, Coca-Cola, gave their blessing, CBS decided to go forward with the show and found a child actor named Christopher Shea who was just 8 years old at the time to be the voice of Linus.

His innocent voice but profound reading of that passage from Luke of that holy night ended up becoming what has been called "The most magical 2 minutes in TV animation." The show didn't air just once as planned, but of course, has become a classic that airs every year. It ultimately won a Peabody award and an Emmy. And I like to think it's because Schulz dared to describe the true meaning of Christmas.

The Gospel of John in chapter 1 that we read every year on Christmas day is St. John's attempt to explain the true meaning of Christmas. And he describes it this way, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

It is the most magical 5 sentences in the New Testament...and beyond. St. John dared to describe the true meaning of Christmas and ultimately, of God's purposes for our world. John, like the Gospel of Luke, describe for us a Savior. This is no ordinary savior because God is involved in this magical and wonder-filled act of salvation. The Word became human flesh in order to shine a light – a light so bright that it would not only provide a path for us to see, but it would defeat the darkness itself.

You see, the meaning of Christmas is the message that all shall be well...because God so loved the world that God saved it. God saved the world; God saved and continues to save you and me by entering our world as a baby and then overcoming evil and death itself in Christ Jesus. It's a story that needs to be told and told again and we need to be reminded of it over and over again because it's easy for us to forget when the darkness and pain and suffering and division and loss overwhelm us. It's been a hard year. That's why we need to be courageous – like Charles Schulz and 8-year-old Christopher Shea: and remind the world of the meaning of Christmas. Because, like Charles Schulz asked, "If we don't do it, who will?"

Merry Christmas.