

Expect Miracles

One of my favorite holiday movies growing up was “Miracle on 34th Street” ... you know the classic version with Natalie Wood and Maureen O’Hara. In 1994 a remake was released and I refused to even watch it, because you don’t remake a classic. And then a couple of years ago I did, and actually liked it better than the original. In one scene, Santa Claus confronts the department store executive who foolishly refuses to believe him:

She says: “I believe that Christmas is for children. I don’t think that there is any harm in not believing in a figure that many acknowledge to be a fiction.”

To which Santa Claus responds: “Oh, but there is. There is. I’m not just a whimsical figure who wears a charming suit and affects a jolly demeanor. You know, I’m a symbol of the human ability to be able to suppress the selfish and hateful tendencies that rule the major part of our lives. If you can’t believe, if you can’t accept anything on faith, then you’re doomed for a life dominated by doubt.”



We are beginning a new series all about miracles. And to begin, let's ask the question, what *is* a miracle? The word miracle is a Latin word meaning "wonderful sign." In this broad sense almost any good thing can be taken as a miraculous thing. And we use it all the time. You may have had this experience of a good thing and named it a miraculous thing:

- Sometimes you say that with surprise:
It's a miracle we got the account.
- Sometimes with skepticism:
It'll be a miracle if she makes it at all.
- Sometimes with sarcasm:
It's a miracle this thing even works at all.
- Sometimes we say it with a certain unhopeful resignation
It would take a miracle for her to ever be nice to me
It would take a miracle for me to ever please my boss
It would take a miracle for me to pass this class
It would be a miracle if my parents ever understood me

In all those statements we are saying they are good things that are unexpected things...though there might actually be some reasonable explanation disqualifying them as genuine, bona-fide miracles...in the sense of truly impossible things happening.



Maybe that's the way you think about all so-called miracles...nice events but, lets face it, once you get beyond the emotion content, or the scam there is a reasonable explanation.

You don't believe in miracles, not really, not real miracles.

Maybe they're just nice stories, like fairy tales or children's stories. They're nice to repeat to kids, easy to use to dupe dummies, but when you're grown up you move on; when you understand how the world really works, you don't let yourself get duped.

Maybe you're one of those people live lives are dominated by doubt. And more than any other season of the year you approach *this* season, with doubt.

- You doubt that this is all going to be anything but a hassle.
- You doubt that you're going to enjoy it.
- You doubt that it's not going to cost you way more than you want to spend.
- You doubt that it's worth it.

- Maybe your doubt springs from loss, like the loss of a loved one this past year, which makes the prospect of a Merry Christmas doubtful.
- Maybe your doubt is mixed up with fear, fear of some health issue you're dealing with, or financial problem that is currently looming large.



I understand and appreciate your viewpoint.
But in that context, let me share with you my own.
Here's what I believe.

I believe in God, and I believe God created the universe, designed this world and set up the laws of nature...the predictable, measurable laws of nature. And he did it because he loves us. He loves us so he created order...that way we don't have to wonder if gravity is working today or if our food will really sustain us or if air will keep us breathing. In that sense this whole universe is miraculous.

- The sun, the moon, the stars are wondrous works of God's invention and creativity that have fixed places and patterns
- That the earth is charged with the grandeur of God miraculous design that can be charted and followed, there is, to some degree a coherence we can rely on

- And all of us get to experience first hand the “miracle” of life and learn for ourselves how our lives and our bodies, usually reliably work.

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I believe God created the world and sustains it and intervenes in it all the time. We’re not on our own. He didn’t set the world up and walk away and say “Good luck.” Instead his hand is upon this world and he rules.

That’s what today’s feast of Christ the King is reminding us. The feast day was established by the church in the dark days following the end of the disastrous First World War, when it looked like the world was coming to an end, at least the world that many people had known. The feast is a reminder, an antidote to the way of life which leaves God out of man’s thinking and living and organizes life as if God does not exist. Christ the King is intended to proclaim in a striking and effective manner Christ’s rule over everything: individuals, families, societies governments, nations, history and nature. In the book of Revelation this is expressed, Christ says:

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord,
“the one who is and who was and who is to come,
the almighty.”*

Revelation 1.8

The prophet Daniel tells us about Christ the King:

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
That shall not be taken away,
His kingship shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel 7:13-14

Christ exercises this dominion in small little ways and great big ways and every other kind of way too. And sometimes he just takes the laws of nature, and physics and reason...all of which he designed, and he just turns them upside down.

When the Bible talks about miracles, God is superseding the way things usually work, in a way that we have the capacity to recognize, because we know how things work. In the Bible a miracle is, specifically:

- and extraordinary event
- perceptible to the senses
- produced by God
- as a sign of God, leading us to a deeper understanding of God
- that helps reveal God's greater plan.

That's what happened at Christmas.

The first Christmas was a miracle.

Actually, it was a series of miracles. Lots of them, one after another after another.

Sometime this Christmas season, go back and read the first two chapters in Matthew's gospel and the first

two chapters in Luke's gospel. That's where the Bible tells us about Christmas. Verse for verse, there are probably more miracles in those chapters than anywhere else in Scripture.
Miracle after miracle after miracle.

But here's the other thing about the Christmas story that we're going to be looking at in the weeks ahead: Not only does God keep *sending* miracles...the people we meet in this story keep *expecting* them.

- Joseph does the unusual, even strange things the angel tells him to do, because he expects a miracle.
- The shepherds risk their jobs and their flocks, because they expect a miracle.
- The wise men undertake an expensive and dangerous journey, one that makes them look even silly, because they expect a miracle.
- Above all Mary spends nine months literally expecting a miracle.

Many of the he people we meet in the Christmas story are all expecting miracles and God keeps sending them.

Hmmm.... maybe, just maybe these two things are not unrelated.

On the other hand, there are other people we'll be meeting in the course of this story, people like King Herod who miss the miracles the others see. Why? Well, their lives are dominated by doubt and they simply cannot see the miracles that are there to be seen, the miracles the others see clearly.



Over the next few weeks we are going to look at the miracle of Christmas and how to more effectively open ourselves up to the wonderful things God wants to do in our lives this Christmas season. How to see what he wants us to see, and more than that, how to expect to see it...how to expect miracles.

- Next week, week two of our series, we are going to look at the place to start when it comes to miracles.
- The following week, week three, will be all about how to prepare for miracles
- The fourth week of the series we're taking a week to talk about praying for miracles, and that week we'll also be offering the sacrament of anointing all weekend long (we'll be explaining that sacrament as well)
- Finally we'll be looking at our response

I want to ask you to do two things: one thing for yourself and the other for someone else.

For someone else, consider who you know who needs to hear this message, or any part of it. There are several ways to make that happen. The most obvious is to invite them to join us in the weeks ahead. We have cards at the Information Desk in our main lobby you can use to do that. You can also very simply make an invitation to join us live on line, every Sunday at 10:30am or 5:30pm.

If who you're thinking of is not available or able to join our services live, invite them to catch the past weekend message the following week, beginning on Monday afternoon. Just go to our home page and click messages.

The other invitation you can make, is to join us on Christmas Eve, we're going to the Cow Palace at the Maryland State Fair, we'll have more seats than ever, and there is one for your guest too. Our Christmas Eve message will be about miracles. Who in your life needs to hear about miracles?

Here's what I want to ask you to do this week for yourself.

If you are a person of faith, if you would describe yourself as a believer and you believe in miracles: take

time in your quiet time this week to consider what miracle you are looking for, or expecting, or at least could expect this Christmas. I'd like you to come back next weekend prepared to answer that question.

- Maybe its healing a relationship, maybe it's a healing that needs to happen for the whole family
- Maybe its finding a job; maybe its finding a job for your spouse or your recent college graduate
- Maybe its getting into college
- Maybe its getting out of debt and into a more solid financial situation with your family
- Maybe its finding a way forward through a health related challenge, or maybe its learning to live with a problem they tell you can't be changed
- Maybe its just about not being alone, and so lonely all the time

Let me be straight forward with you. I have no idea if the miracle you might be looking for will ever happen. Maybe it will and maybe it won't.

I am *not* promising the miracle you want,
I *am* promising the miracle God wants.

What I am promising is that if you are *anticipating, and preparing and expecting* the miracle God wants in your life...you will see it.

And for all those of you who do not believe in miracles, who doubt, whose lives perhaps are dominated by doubt, I'd like to invite you to simply play along. Humor the rest of us.

After all, Christmas is for children, right? So why not just enter into the spirit of the season and play along?

If you do, I suspect you'll discover that its not so much that Christmas is for children, as it is that Christmas is for believers.