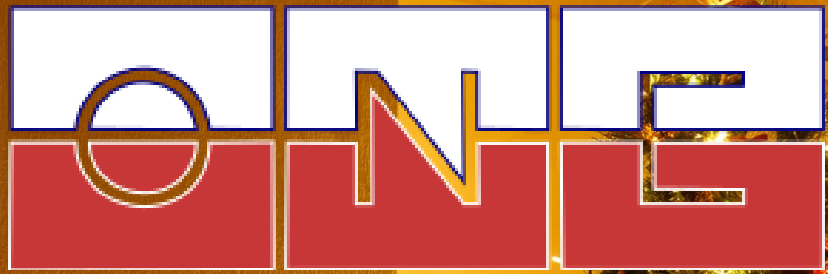


INSIDE:

+ **Faith on Film:
Christmas Edition**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance
December 2022

**MERRY
CHRISTMAS!**





Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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Editor's Note:

This month we asked our writers to do movie reviews of their favorite family, Christmas movies. Maybe there is one here your family hasn't seen yet, or one you would like to revisit this holiday season. Enjoy!

'It's a Wonderful Life' Teaches Us How Our Lives Affect Others

Written by:

Cheryl Glassman

When asked to write about my favorite Christmas movie, the choice was an easy one. I have been a fan of actor Jimmy Stewart for as long as I can remember. My mom liked him too. She introduced me to him one evening, asking me to watch "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" with her. I was hooked. I even bought postage stamps with his picture on them.

His portrayal of characters was always, to me, done with richness, from the heart. The film, "It's A Wonderful Life," directed by Frank Capra, was released in movie theaters Jan. 7, 1947, nine years before I was born. It is a movie that remains a Christmas staple to this day. There are several reasons I like this film, and why I think it is important

to rewatch/re-experience films such as "It's A Wonderful Life."

The story revolves around a man named George, who is planning a trip to see the world before he goes to college. His travels are put to a stop when his father dies. He is asked to run the family business, the town's building and loan, which he does, much to the chagrin of the local self-serving banker.

George marries a beautiful woman and starts out living what he believes will be a good life. Then, there is a run on the bank, and in order to help the people, George and his wife, Mary, use the money they had saved for their honeymoon to save the building and loan. George's expertise helps the building and loan establish an area of low-income housing to replace the slum run by Mr.

Potter, the banker.

George's Uncle Billy goes to Mr. Potter and has words with him, and in the process accidentally leaves the \$8,000 bank deposit there. Potter, being a no-good, keeps the money. George takes responsibility for the loss, but in so doing, berates those he loves and in desperation, decides to end his life.

He prays for guidance. An angel named Clarence is sent to his aid. Clarence is on the cusp when it comes to angels, and must save/help George in order to earn his wings. When George tells Clarence he wishes he had never been born, Clarence grants him the wish. George and Clarence embark on a journey through the lives of those whom George knows and loves, and George sees what their lives would have been like without him.

'It's a Wonderful Life' (Continued)

The movie sounds a bit depressing, right? In many ways, every time I watch this movie, it reminds me of people I know, myself included, who have gone through trials and times of despair wherein it seems nothing can be done to make things right.

It also reminds me there will always be those in the world who seek to look past the needy, or even family members, to better themselves. But the movie also is very powerful in giving intensely portrayed glimpses of what life would be like if someone were never born.

When I think of the lives of my loved ones and others I have met throughout my life, I see myself in George. What would the lives of those I have known or met be like had I

never been born?

I hope I have and can make a positive impact. The most poignant moment in the movie is when we see George ask Clarence for his life back, which Clarence gives him. When George returns home, his family and friends have come together, giving of their own time and money to help save the building and loan.

How many times have we seen this happen in our world? During times of trial or tragedy, we see people giving to help others--those they don't even know. Do angels exist? I like to believe they do. I believe they surround us with the wisdom, strength, and beauty of God's love. But, like George, we sometimes have to look past ourselves to see it.

One of the most famous movie lines of all time comes at the end of "It's A Wonderful Life." George's little daughter says, "Look Daddy. Teacher says every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings." Let us be reminded of the wondrous presence of God, through even the smallest of things, and the wondrous gift of life He freely gives to each and every one of us.

May this Christmas enlighten our hearts as we seek to share signs of God's love in what we say and do. May you have a blessed Christmas!



Cheryl Glassman is the Director of Music at St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church in Hays.

Is It Possible to Skip Christmas?

Written by:

Becky Rogowski

When I saw the topic for this month's "ONE," I knew right away which movie I wanted to write about. I'm all about a good Christmas movie, but I'm even more about a hilarious comedy. Our family rule has always been to read a book before watching something in movie

-form. That being said, my chosen movie is "Christmas with the Kranks," based on the John Grisham novel, "Skipping Christmas."

The book was a quick and belly-laugh producing read, so it set a very high bar for the movie, which was directed by Joe Roth and released in 2004. The movie did not disappoint on the funny scale.

It is relatable if you have ever found yourself thinking that taking a break from the holidays (and all the craziness the season can bring) seems like a great idea.

The movie is about Luther and Nora Krank who are about to spend their first Christmas without their daughter, Blair, who has just left for the Peace Corps in

Is It Possible to Skip Christmas? (Continued)

Peru. They live in a neighborhood that is highly competitive when it comes to decorating for the holidays. The entire neighborhood has matching Frosty the Snowman characters that go on their roofs, and everyone goes "all out" with their light and yard displays. Their neighborhood has won against other neighborhoods for "years".

Luther isn't feeling the holiday spirit without Blair, and when he sees an ad for a cruise to the Caribbean, he jumps at the opportunity. Then has to come up with a way to pay for it. His "obvious" solution is to SKIP Christmas. He says without a tree, decorations, the obligatory neighborhood party, gifts, etc., they can easily afford the trip. This seems so easy and obvious--to Luther and Nora. The neighborhood immediately labels them as "Scrooges" who don't have any loyalty to the neighborhood and certainly no holiday spirit. It points out how ridiculously people can get wrapped up in focusing on the incorrect things during this season.

A large portion of the movie deals with the drama that happens between the Kranks and their neighbors. The neighbors want the

Kranks to at least put their Frosty on the roof, but Luther has decided that it's either all or nothing, and he's chosen nothing. The hostility between friends is accentuated and makes it seem ridiculous that anyone would want to "skip" Christmas, but at the same time you can completely relate to the Kranks wanting to escape from the madness. It definitely points out that we do a lot of things out of habit during the holidays, and it can definitely distract us from the true meaning behind the season.

The evening before the Kranks leave on their cruise, Blair calls to surprise her family--and, oh, what a shock it is! She's coming home and bringing her fiancée to meet the family. She expresses how excited she is for the neighborhood party and to show him all the decorations and festivities. She tells them she'll be arriving in 24 hours.

Luther and Nora are excited and mortified all at the same time. The trip must be cancelled (no refund), and the decorations must happen--and quickly. Now keep in mind how upset the entire neighborhood is with Luther and Nora.

The neighborhood rallies around them "because of Blair," and it turns into one of

the best holidays ever for the neighborhood. Blair and her fiancée don't realize her parents were leaving for the Caribbean until after things settle down. She's able to share her childhood nostalgia, and they are able to enjoy having her home. The neighborhood competition is also safe.

The movie is so over-the-top funny in the most absurd way, but it is so painstakingly true. I related so much to this the year my oldest daughter moved away for college. Our holidays just didn't seem the same--until she made it home and surprised all of us with her arrival. We watch the movie every year, and I laugh at the same stuff every year. There's a little of all of us in this one, and if you haven't seen it, I encourage you to read the book and then watch the movie.

And to answer my own question posed at the beginning...no, I think the holidays are deeply woven into our beings, and it isn't possible to "skip" Christmas. Who would want to?



Becky Rogowski is a member of Hays First Presbyterian Church.

'A Christmas Carol' Is a Timeless Classic—Really

Written by:
Anna Towns

"On Christmas night, all Christians sing to hear the news, the angels bring!" ("Sussex Carol" – song).

It is said that Charles Dickens chose to call his classic tale "A Christmas Carol" because he hoped it would be shared together with friends and family for years to come, just like singing familiar carols around the fire. Dickens could not know in 1843 that his story would do just that—and that so many variations, from musicals to Muppets, would bring the story to life.

The 1984 version, starring George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge, has and always will be my favorite Christmas movie. The phrase "timeless" gets thrown around often, especially regarding Christmas, but this tale of family, hope, joy, and redemption truly is a timeless classic.

I doubt that anyone reading this hasn't seen or read any iteration of this story. If you haven't, I suggest you stop reading immediately and at least watch the 26-minute-long Mickey Mouse version (available at the Hays Public Library), because there are spoilers ahead.

"A Christmas Carol" tells of a mean old bachelor who hoards his wealth and seems destined to die alone. Doesn't sound much like a joyous Christmas story worthy of singing about, does it? How about a story where this same man builds a relationship with his only nephew, improves the lives of his employee and the man's family, becomes an active member of his community, and is redeemed by a renewed vigor for life and companionship? That is a perfect Christmas message.

Often throughout the film, we are reminded of Scrooge's solitary existence. His business partner, Jacob Marley, died seven years ago. Scrooge has one employee with whom he does not socialize. His only nephew, Fred, is estranged enough that Scrooge has not even met his wife. Scrooge's large home has cobwebs on the bells because he never has any visitors, and the rooms remain dark and cold.

When Marley's ghost first comes to warn Scrooge, he tells him that all souls must "walk abroad among their fellow men," and that if they don't do this in life, they will be "doomed to wander the world" after death.

The subsequent spirits emphasize Scrooge's lost relationships. The Ghost of

Christmas Past shows us that some of these losses were beyond Scrooge's control—his mother's death, his father's distance, being left with only the imaginary friends from his books while at school, and, ultimately, his sister's early passing. In his early adulthood, he retreats further into himself. We see his loss of early friendships and of his true love, Belle. As an adult, his distance from business acquaintances, clerk, family, and fellow man are apparent.

Living an increasingly secluded life has allowed Scrooge to distance himself from the struggles of humanity, to see not the bustling personal interactions in the marketplace, but only the money exchanging hands, "a lot of buying." This attitude that dancing is a waste of time, that Christmas is a "poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every 25th of December," or that he "cannot afford to make idle people merry," is easy when you have distanced yourself from and are not empathizing with your siblings in Christ.

Scrooge must reckon with the fact that the poor he considered a "surplus population" are not lazy sots who should be in workhouses, prison, or dead, but people who are doing their best to

'A Christmas Carol' Is a Timeless Classic—Really (Continued)

provide for their children, just as his own hard-working employee is caring for his own family. The Ghost of Christmas Present also shows Scrooge Ignorance and Want, the fruits of all humanity, which each year we fail to eradicate.

The third, "more mercurial" spirit shows uncaring and insensitive scenes in reaction to a death. Scrooge is forced to see how his isolation will affect his impression on his community when he dies. He sees his business acquaintances only willing to attend his funeral to receive a free meal. His housekeeper sells items she stole from him, and she states outright that he died alone. His only lasting impression, good businessman or not, is of hard, unfeeling interactions that do not merit any tenderness.

After confronting his own imminent death, he arrives back in his own warm house still alive. Scrooge dances and leaps, declaring: "I'm as light as a feather, happy as an angel, merry as a schoolboy,

giddy as a drunken man!" He decides immediately to change his ways and starts making community connections and thinking of others above himself.

He sends a huge goose to his employee, Bob Cratchit, but does so anonymously—providing sustenance for the Cratchits without receiving any credit. Scrooge then goes to make amends with Fred, to meet his wife, and to attend their annual Christmas dinner. This is not so he can enjoy a free meal, but so that he can build connections to his family and make up for all the time he spent walling himself off. It might be difficult, as this is certainly a big change for him, but the benefits will be great as well.

"Ebenezer Scrooge was better than his word. He became as good a friend, as good a master, as good a man as the old city knew . . . he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us. God bless us, everyone!"

If you were visited by these three spirits, what character-making moments might you see? What joyful, heart-wrenching, truth-revealing things might you experience anew? Who would be your Marley? What changes might you make because of the things they show you, and what is stopping you from making those changes now? What relationships can you mend, create, and strengthen? Will you "remember Christmas and keep it in [your] heart, live in the past, present, and future, and not shut out the lessons that they teach?"

"So grant us all a change of heart. Rejoice for Mary's son. Pray peace on Earth for all mankind, God bless us everyone!" ("God Bless Us Everyone" –song)



Anna Towns serves in many capacities as a lifelong member of Trinity Lutheran Church, ELCA, in Hays.

No Grinch Can Steal Christmas

Written by:
Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry Sr.

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

—John 10:10 (KJV)

No Grinch Can Steal Christmas (Continued)

Last night, upon viewing the movie "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" for the umpteenth time, I thought that the writers of this movie must have had influence from Biblical origin.

The film, directed by Ron Howard, was released in 2000. It is based on the Dr. Seuss 1957 children's book of the same name and stars Jim Carrey as the nefarious title character.

The residents of Whoville are happy and joyous, full of life, and these joyous souls have a peace beyond measure. To these residents, their lives are beautiful and there are no challenges or obstacles that could bring pain and sorrow. While the movie does not have a Biblical, spiritual plot line, it is clear that there is a force at work that does not want anyone to be happy.

Thus, we have a very similar plot line, although not written on a script, to our very lives. The devil is never happy when we are connected to God. The devil has no desire to see us at peace.

The residents of this little city continue to enjoy their life preparing for this event called Christmas. From that moment on, there is this force called a Grinch who decides that he will steal the joy of every

single person in this town.

His plans are to disrupt, bring pain, and wreak havoc on the town. As the Grinch is exercising his vicious plan, most of the town's residents are sleeping, unaware of the dastardly deed being done. Thus, the enemy comes to rob, to steal, and to kill while most are oblivious to the danger.

But one resident of the town is awake. This precious and innocent young girl interrupts this night of thievery to show an act of kindness to a person whose heart is three sizes too small. This act of kindness does not disrupt and bring an end to this rude and vicious plot, and we see how the enemy is not really concerned about anyone's wellbeing. The enemy is only interested in bringing pain.

The Grinch is successful in taking everything from the town and carrying it away. But the Grinch has no place to store the ill-gotten gains, and the sleigh full of materials is about to slide down the mountain to destruction. At that point, there is a moment of reconsideration, a moment where the Grinch realizes the error of his ways, a moment of conversion.

It is only then that the Grinch tries to stop the path of destruction. With every fiber

of his being, he seizes control of the sleigh and returns the materials back to the people, the residents of Whoville who are undeterred by the Grinch's desire to bring destruction.

Christmas does come, regardless of the Grinch's plan to destroy the joy of the residents of Whoville.

Likewise, it is clear that the devil cannot steal our joy. The devil cannot thwart the plan of God today or at any time. It should be clear to us that we should make a choice of following God. No matter how many times the devil tries to bring havoc, pain, and destruction, God's plan is going to be successful. Despite the attempts of the evil one to interrupt our path to peace, if we trust in God, our lives will be secure.

As we plan our activities during this yuletide season, may our focus be to accept God's will, because there is no Grinch who can interrupt God's plans and desires for our lives. If we consider God's purpose, we will find not only find satisfaction, we will find salvation.



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