

Today our Advent series turns to a much newer Christmas movie, but one that is already making the lists of the top Christmas movies of all time – Elf.

For those who may not have seen the movie, the story begins when Santa Claus visits an orphanage on Christmas Eve. While Santa is busy eating cookies, a baby climbs out of his crib and crawls toward a teddy bear in Santa’s sack, and the baby, who comes to be named ‘Buddy’ is raised by the elves at the North Pole and in school he learns the Code of the Elves.

Briefly, the Code of the Elves is, one: *Treat every day like Christmas*; two: *There is always room on the Nice List*; and three: *The best way to spread Christmas Cheer is singing loud for all to hear*.

In many ways, it is this code that guides the rest of the movie and it is this code that points us to the real Christmas Story. So let’s start by looking at the second rule of the code first: There’s room for everyone on the nice list.

In time Buddy realizes that he is not an elf but a human, but the real tragedy for him is finding out first that his human mother has died, but then, second, that his human father is not on the nice but on the naughty list.

So he leaves his home at the North Pole to go to a strange country called New York City. He passes through the seven levels of the Candy Cane forest, through the sea of swirly twirly gum drops, and then walks through the Lincoln Tunnel to find his Dad.

He meets his family, his step-mother and Michael, his 12-year old step brother who latches on to Buddy, but then who wouldn’t latch on to a big brother who tells you that the 4 main food groups are Candy, Candy Canes, Candy Corn, and Syrup.

He meets Jovie, a sales clerk; he finds her singing in front of a mirror and tells her how beautiful her singing is, but she tells him that she just can’t sing in front of other people.

And he meets his Dad and once he finds him he just loves him and he won’t stop loving him.

Buddy’s love is unconditional. Even though his Dad is very Scrooge-like and doesn’t want Buddy’s love and can’t really receive it and tries to rid himself of Buddy’s presence: Buddy still loves him.

Buddy’s trip to get his Dad on the nice list is played out, literally, with a pesky, persevering, passionate, persistent love that shares the Christmas Spirit.

And that leads us back to the first code of the elves: *Treat every day like Christmas*.

This means that every day should be filled with the spirit and actions we experience on Christmas day: things like the love of family, the joy of reaching out to friends, the peace we find when we set aside work and all the demands of life to just relax, the kindness and goodness we live out in our communities, the faithfulness we remember as we worship and celebrate a God who loves us and even the self-control of not eating all the Christmas cookies and candy in one day.

Living like every day is Christmas also means recapturing a sense of awe and wonder in life.

I remember one Christmas Eve many years ago, leaving the church after a beautiful worship service of communion and lessons and carols.

It had begun snowing during the service and, there was a dusting on the shrubbery. The snow was still falling softly, and the lights in the yards and through the windows of the decorated Victorian homes in the neighborhood radiated a

Magi-like moment, as Matthew writes in his gospel, “They stopped...overwhelmed with joy.”

The beauty of the night filled me with an awe and wonder that I often don't take the time to experience. The quiet of the evening, the beauty of the snow and the lights on people's homes and trees was wonderful. It was a real Christmas moment.

Buddy reminds us to find this kind of awe and wonder every day in all of life and to find joy and laughter in the little things we often overlook or take for granted especially as we grow older.

And couldn't we all stand to be a bit more like that? I know I could. What's wrong with being like Buddy and putting “snuggle” on your To-do list? But I do draw the line with Buddy when he puts maple syrup on his spaghetti!

The point is that Buddy is excited and curious and wonderfully open in a very jaded, guarded world. Every day is an adventure that he just can't wait to begin.

He could have let the world beat him down and lose his joy, but Buddy's spirit is indomitable.

Whether he's having a blast discovering a revolving door, in and around for a spin or two and spun out like a carnival ride or trying to put the angel on top of the Christmas tree, all 6ft. of Buddy climbing the tree and, yes, it comes tumbling down!

But whatever Buddy does, he is all in.

I think we can learn a lot from Buddy.

Buddy's enthusiasm and openness offers hope in a cynical world of disbelief. And, thankfully, that goodness has a ripple effect on those around him.

Now the third code of the elves says this: The best way to spread Christmas Cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

Buddy teaches us that even when others may not be singing or sharing the Christmas spirit, it is important that we do.

Christmas is for music and singing. Singing, whether it's beautiful singing like next Sunday's Lessons and Carols or Christmas concerts around town or off-key, ought-to-be-off-the-planet singing like mine, singing is one of the ways we humans express joy.

And since the essential note of the Christian faith is joy – it's good and right and proper for Christmas to be the season of singing.

It's a powerful scene in the movie when Santa's sleigh is grounded in Central Park and can't fly because people just don't have the Christmas spirit like they used to and Santa's running on empty!

Jovie remembers what Buddy the Elf said about spreading Christmas cheer; and she stands up in the midst of a doubting, Christmas-spiritless crowd and starts to sing.

Then the crowd starts to sing along with her. Santa's sleigh gets the lift it needs, and everyone is a little better off for singing loud for all to hear.

Singing loud for all to hear is what they do in the Bible – you find it all over and around the Christmas story that people are singing, angels are singing.

Old Zechariah at the Temple breaks into song when the angel tells him that at a ripe old age, he is going to be a daddy for the first time. (He was, you remember, the father of John the Baptist.)

The angels are singing as a backdrop to the announcement of Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

And our Scripture Lesson this morning, we heard Mary's song – when she was reflecting on her role as God's chosen servant to give birth to the Messiah – her song is called the “Magnificat.”

It's the word in the first verse – *magnifies*: 'My soul magnifies the Lord'; and isn't that what joy is all about: magnifying, spreading the presence and power and passion of God for all to hear.

I tell you something that you already know, and that is, how blessed this church is with its music ministry - all the choirs, the musicians that contribute, and of course, our director...you know that, don't you?

The music helps us magnify our worship – We all depend on the music, the song that carries our faith, that lifts our spirits, that gives words to our feelings.

When Mary sang that song, Judea was a very troubled country. People lived behind closed doors, if they had a house to live in, for they were afraid of the Roman army or the corrupt government or the religious zealots, the terrorists of their day.

Here, in the dark of that night, a young girl's voice sings out:

*My soul magnifies the Lord...the Mighty One has done great things for me...*

**Mary's song is a song of faith:** She says that God is always faithful, every day is God's day, and this is God's world, and the only true power and might and strength reside with God.

Mary's song reminded herself and her nation that God had been faithful to them through all of the good times, but even more so when their faith was tested, during the challenging times, through wars and famine and rebellions and exile.

**Mary's song is also a song of hope:** Mary sang and lived what the Apostle Paul, maybe building on this very story, when he writes in his letter to the Romans how creation has been groaning in labor pains: "*For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope...But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*"

According to John Claypool, hope "is the energy and fuel that animate life. Hope is to the spirit what breath is to the body."

You see, our hope is not based upon what we can do, our hope is based upon what God can do.

So Mary would sing that song, filled with awe and wonder, patiently pondering how what God had promised, God had delivered his promise to her.

Mary's song is a song of faith and hope.

**Mary's song is also a song of love:** Mary is singing loud and clear for all to hear about a God who is for us, a God who loves us with a love greater than any parent has for a child.

She is singing about a God who has made the decision not to give up on the world but redeem it, not trash it but restore it.

She is singing about a God who sent his own son to show us how to live and then who died for us so we could live, or as someone put it, "That we may know that God's goodness is greater than all our badness."

In other words, there is no situation in life that Christian love cannot embrace and change, not even death.

Again, this is true not because of who we are but because of who God is.

Furthermore, this is true not because of God's great power, but because of God's wondrous love, a love that will not abandon us at our worst or in our darkest hour.

Mary's song is a song of faith and hope and love.

Mary's song is our song and it carries the Christmas message for 2017, which is this: neither deranged gunmen nor violent terrorist, not Wall Street or Capitol Hill, neither conservative nor liberal, neither great riches nor lost jobs, neither disease nor disaster, not pain, not grief, not our pleasures nor our possessions,

neither family difficulties nor personal failure,  
...will have the final word in our lives.

I like what Gail O'Dea says about Mary's song.  
She says that "we, too, are called to...remember  
who God is and what God has done, and to  
sing...(to) look back and sing forward."

Sing forward – sing Mary's song loud for all to  
hear and give yourself in trust to a God for  
whom all things are possible, who can turn a  
hopeless world upside down and who can make  
your life like a Christmas stocking ready to be  
filled with good news of great joy.

Sing forward – sing Mary's song loud for all to  
hear and give yourself in grateful obedience to a  
God who gives us the generous gift of each day,  
ready to be born and brought to life with mercy  
and justice and peace.

Let Mary's song be your song – the joy of faith  
and hope and love that gives words to the  
presence and power and passion of God.

Let your soul magnify the Lord!

Sing it loud for the all to hear!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.