Christmas is nearly here….Santa is coming……well, Santa isn’t coming for Jeanette and I, he has already been and left us a little bundle of fun…and sleepless nights…..and puppy toys all over the floor….but that is not the whole story….and for those moments when we could happily throttle Ralf….there are 10 thousand more moments that all we want to do is snuggle and kiss his furry little face…..we do love that little fella already

I also don’t think this Christmas is going to be the same as normal….no….not because of the covid restrictions…which have changed yet again (sorry I said the C word)….but because with a puppy, theres not going to be any time to simply sit and vegetate watching the cheesy Christmas movies….Elf….home alone……Gremlins….even…a controversial one…Bruce willis in die hard.

My favourite though is a Christmas carol….Scrooge….the older the better…..I even named one of our previous dogs…Marley after Jacob Marley…..I think I have watched it in every form….even the rubbish Scrooged! And the questionable Muppet show version…..

but I love the **story** and the rollercoaster of emotions that a good adaptation takes you on.

But while they are all great stories….ok some are better than the others… they are not **the** story. Because in the midst of all the more modern Christmas stories, we have the original stories, the ones that in a real way gave birth to all the others….without this story, there would be No Christmas.

So, on this the fourth Sunday of Advent, we have the story of one key player in the birth of Jesus, someone who had to be on board with everything that was about to happen, and someone whose **love** would change everything:

Mary.

Our reading today tells us that Mary was ‘Perplexed’ when the angle came to her….Mary was a teenager…alone….visited by an angel and literally the weight of the world was about to be thrust upon her shoulder….I don’t think perplexed really does justice to the emotions that would have been running through her at that time…..I think abstract fear would have been closer to the truth….no matter how holy and calming the angel was, this is still a big deal….and what an understatement that is….

But instead of running for the hills…trying to hide from this massive responsibility….we hear the trust and love that Mary has for God….and this Love is the bedrock of THIS story…..THE story…..The only story that really matters at Christmas…..

we can throw away the soppy Christmas movies….the loosely based Christmas thrillers…..and even…..I cant believe I am saying this….but even a Christmas carol.

The story of Mary can be found in the Magnificat, the song of Mary. It’s a passage of Scripture that tells us how Mary responded to the unexpected and confusing news that she was pregnant. “**My soul magnifies the Lord**,” she says, “**and my spirit rejoices in God.”**

Magnify is an odd term in this context, but I always think of it like this: to magnify God…..to enlarge his image…..his greatness…. is to live your life in a way that makes God’s love for the world even bigger and even more obvious to the people who surround us…. We are called to live a Christian life **despite** the challenges before us and the examples set by some others in society…..we shine a light on the light of the world.

And it takes love to choose to magnify God, especially in times when we are asked to respond to a new challenge or a new reality in our lives….to simply ‘like’ would not be enough….we must love…love like we have never loved before….. And if anyone could understand what it means to respond to God in the midst of the unexpected, it was Mary. She is faced with the end of life as she knew it, and she responds by saying she is going to rejoice and make God’s love known to the world.

Mary’s situation was a little more dire than most of ours…yet another understatement….she was the first person who was asked to respond to the Christmas story, but she wasn’t the last. Because though we are called to participate in the Christmas story in a very different way than Mary was, we are indeed invited into this story none-the-less.

That’s because at Christmas time, if **we** are going to be a part of this Christmas story, we are called to make the hard choice to love. I don’t use that phrase “hard choice” lightly….I know we are Christians….and we are supposed to love everyone….but I use that phrase because loving this world, and loving one another, often requires us to set aside other feelings and really work at trying to love. It requires us to invest in others. It requires us to give of ourselves. And, most of all, love requires **us** to be willing to be changed.

Let’s go back to those Christmas movies again….and an attempt to save my favourite movie. I can easily close my eyes and see Ebenezer Scrooge, and how he was transformed from a grumpy, hard-hearted miser to a generous and loving man.

And as I think about the story I start to think about a lot of those other Christmas shows I like. The main character often goes through some sort of transformation. And, when you think about it, as much as these are Christmas stories, they could also be Advent stories. Because Advent is all about getting ready….Advent is all about our own transformation…. It’s about preparing our heart for someone who is coming, and about opening it up to new ways of being.

Christians are supposed to work towards transforming the world for good. But that’s a tall order. It’s hard to change the world. We can do our best, we can work for good, we can pray for peace, but in the end, we find out an important truth: you can’t create love in the world, until you find love in yourself. And love changes us.

Even Christmas movies know this.

Scrooge realizes the error of his ways, and his heart is transformed, and only then does he give generously….. love unconditionally….

If we’re really serious about Advent, if we’re really serious about preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ, if we are truly using this season to focus on what is coming, there is no way that we won’t be changed by it. Maybe we won’t have a big, miraculous, carol-filled Christmas morning, but inside our heart, if you listen closely, you’ll hear the change happening and the love filling you.

And as powerful as that love is inside of us, it’s even more powerful when we share it. What if in the face of all that we find troubling with the world….especially now with so many feeling isolated…what if we showed the world what God’s love really means? What if we showed how powerful it could be?

Mary chose to magnify God’s love for the world through her actions. And her story is one that can inspire all of us. She said; ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’…..wow

But that’s not the end of the story. The great Christmas story continues to play out, and the truly incredible thing is that you and I are invited onto the screen, and we even get to choose our own lines.

And so, as we prepare for Christmas Eve just a few days from now, here’s the big question: What is your script going to say?

My prayer for us all is that your script is going to be full of the words and actions…..words and actions which magnify God and live out the real Christmas story…

My hope is that it will be a story of a person who has been **transformed** by the **love** of God, and who wants to love the world **because** of God.

If you open your hearts to the love of Christ this year, then **your** story is about to get really good. I can’t wait to hear it. And neither can a world that could use some good news stories right about now.

Amen?