

## *Christmas in the Movies*

### *“Miracle on 34th Street - Hope*

[Romans 8:24-25](#)

This year, we are taking a light-hearted approach to Advent by looking at some of the most popular Christmas movies and finding gospel messages in them. Last Sunday, we watched the Polar Express, and today, we are going to look at “Miracle on 34th Street” which was released in 1947 and won three Academy Awards. One interesting fact about this Christmas comedy-drama film is that it was first released not during the Christmas season but in early May.

The movie begins with the annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Doris Walker who is in charge of the parade discovers the santa who was to be on the float is intoxicated. The Santa is too drunk to participate in the parade, so she immediately has to find someone else to replace him. Doris sees Kris Kringle nearby the drunken Santa and hires him. Kris does a great job in the parade and is hired again, this time, to be the santa at Macy’s department store on 34th street in New York City.

However, the truth about Doris Walker is that she does not believe in Santa. Though it’s her job to hire and manage Santa for her company, she doesn’t care much about the idea of Santa. She sees the world through her intellect and common sense and she considers herself reasonable and realistic. Doris says to her neighbor, Fred Gailey, “I think we should be realistic and completely truthful with our children and not have them growing up, believing in a lot of legends and myths like Santa Claus, for example.” So, no wonder that her little daughter, Suzy does not believe in Santa Claus, either.

Kris Kringle believes Christmas has become commercialized too much and lost its true meaning. So, working as a Santa at Macy’s, he is now determined to correct the wrong. The toy department supervisor advises Kris to suggest other toys to the children when he finds out that Macy’s does not have the toys they want. But, instead, Kris tells the children that they will get what they want, and he sends the parents to other stores for the toys their children want. The toy department supervisor is shocked and can’t believe his ears when he hears what Kris is saying to people.

But, he soon realizes that Kris’ action is creating rather positive responses from their customers. They are saying, We will come back to shop at Macy’s because you sent us to other stores to find what we want. We were treated with honesty and kindness. Because of the unexpected outcome of Kris’ action, all other departments at Macy’s adopt the same retail policy. Through all this, they learned a valuable lesson: “When you put the needs of your customers first, their hearts will be open to you, and they become more loyal to you.” Soon, Macy’s competitors also adopt Macy’s policy of sending their customers to other stores when they do not have the items they are looking for.

Because of Kris Kringle, a new Santa at Macy’s, people in the city of New York experience Christmas differently. Christmas is no longer about me and meeting my own needs, but about others and meeting their needs first. That’s the true spirit of Christmas. People are inspired to be more generous to others.

Yet, despite all the great things Kris has done to Macy's, Doris discovers something troubling about Kris. Let's take a look. (*Show clip #1*)

Kris believes he is a real Santa, and Doris believes he is mentally ill. So, she sends him to be examined by Macy's psychologist, Dr. Sawyer who then diagnoses Kris to be delusional and potentially violent. Kris ends up locked up in a mental hospital and later taken to the court.

Fred Gailey, Doris' lawyer neighbor and boyfriend believes in Kris and comes to his defense. It's a tough case for Fred because he has to prove that Kris is actually Santa Claus as he claims. Fred sees goodness in people. He has faith in them and hopes for their future. And, Fred is willing to give up everything, his job and reputation, his future employment opportunities, his secured and comfortable lifestyle only to fight for Kris.

As you can imagine, Doris is very upset with Fred because she cannot understand his decision. She tells Fred to be realistic and face facts. When Fred suspects that Doris does not have faith in him, she responds, "It's not a question of faith. It's just common sense." Then, Fred says, "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. Don't you see it's not just Kris that's on trial. It's everything he stands for. It's kindness, joy, love and all other intangibles." But, Doris can't believe those intangibles because they do not make sense. She says, "those lovely intangibles are attractive but aren't worth much."

Actually, many people are like Doris. They look at the world through common sense. For them, faith has to be supported by proofs and evidences. But, the Bible defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1)." As we heard last Sunday, Jesus told his disciples: "Blessed are those who believe and have not seen" (John 20:29). And, as we read together earlier, the apostle Paul wrote, "Hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:24).

Common sense tells us that the Christmas story, God coming into the world as a human being, is unrealistic. There is no common sense in it. Yet, the story of the birth of Jesus makes sense when we embrace the intangibles of faith, hope, joy, peace, and love; when we desire to see beyond what we can see; when we are willing to embrace something greater than what we can imagine. And, that something is our God who sent Jesus Christ as the light of the world. When we surrender ourselves to God, we can see the Christ Child in Bethlehem, the son of God and the Savior of the world.

Despite his pure and good intention, Fred struggles to prove that Kris Kringle is a real Santa because he cannot find any good evidence. Then, something totally unexpected happens, and he wins the case. Let's take a look. (*Show clip #2*)

This was how the miracle happened. Each year, many of the post offices around the world get many Christmas cards and letters that children write to Santa. Without any particular address to deliver, those mail end up just being stored until they are disposed later. So, when one of the mail-handlers at the New York Post Office read the news about the court trial of Kris Kringle, he had a brilliant idea to solve their problem: to deliver all those mail addressed to Kris Kringle, the Santa at the New York court house!

Doris experiences changes in her when she opens her heart to Kris Kringle and she comes to believe in him through the love of her daughter, Suzy and her friend Fred. As she believes in Kris, her life changes. The miracle on 34th Street is the miracle of hope being born in Doris; the miracle of hope coming into the world through Kris Kringle who symbolizes Jesus Christ.

Actually, the name Kris Kringle comes from the word Christkindle which means Christ Child. During the protestant reformation, Martin Luther thought too much focus was being given to the 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop - Saint Nicholus, also known as Santa Claus. So, he tried to shift the focus from Sinterklass to Christkindle - from Santa Claus to the Christ Child, so Christ could be the focus. Eventually, Christkindle became Kris Kringle. So Kris Kringle is just another name for the Christ child.

You can see many parallels between Kris and Jesus. Many refused to recognize Kris for he was, as many did not recognize who Jesus was. Some people thought he was crazy, as religious leaders said of Jesus. Kris was falsely accused, as Jesus was. Kris went to trial, as Jesus did. Kris changed people's hearts through his love for them, as Jesus did. Kris gave hope to people as Jesus did.

Let's take a look at the last clip and see how the little girl Suzy's dream came true. (*Show clip #3*)

This Advent, we are waiting for the Christ Child to appear. Will we recognize the Christ child for who he really is? Will we allow our faith and hope to be bigger than our intellect, common sense, and reasoning? Will we allow the spirit of the season, or as Fred Gaily says, the lovely intangibles of kindness, joy and love to dwell in us? Will you be the bearer of Christ's light to the places of darkness? Will you bring Christ's hope to the hopeless?