

A Meditation for Christmas Eve, 2025
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How many of you have watched “A Charlie Brown Christmas”? It debuted in December, 1965. 61 years ago this month.

It’s the Christmas Special that almost wasn’t.

When it was all ready to go, it was screened by two CBS Executives at CBS headquarters in New York. They watched the entire show in silence. Neither of them laughed once.

When the lights came on, they shook their heads and shrugged.

“Well,” one of the Executives said to the producer, “You gave it a good try.” “It seems a little flat,” the other one said.

“Too slow,” said the other, “and the script is too innocent.”

“And the reading that long Nativity story from the Bible...that really scares us. Religion and entertainment don’t mix on television.”

They wasn’t all they had to say...there were the technical problems. The animation was crude – apparently, even the creator of Peanuts, Charles Schulz thought the animation was a disaster. And then were the voices – “totally unprofessional, you should have used adults.” At this point the producer, Lee Mendelson, said he was thinking to himself, “I tried to tell Schulz – using untrained kids, some of them were so young, they couldn’t read – and then the long Bible reading...no way it’s not going to work.”

The CBS Executives weren’t done yet: “And the music, it just doesn’t fit.” And where is the laughter? “A comedy without a laughter track. It won’t fly.”

It won’t fly!

AND, here we are more than 60 years after its debut...show me again how many of you have seen *A Charlie Brown Christmas*?

Even with all their misgivings, to their credit, the Executives let it go forward. The year of its debut, it became the most successful special in Television history.

In countless ways this story of a birth some 2000 years ago has been told and retold, in all kinds of ways and in all kinds of media...including animation...and story endures... it stays with us...it still has the power to speak to something both beyond us and yet, at the same time, it speaks to something deep within us:

“In that region there were shepherds in the fields...keeping watch over their flocks by night...”

And here we are..having passed through all the commercialization & rushing about of Christmas...and settled into our places on this Christmas Eve...to hear it and sing it once again. We could easily read it at home...most of us could practically tell it by heart. But there is something about coming out on a cold wintery night and making our way to this candlelit sanctuary where we huddle together, silently, for the most part...and hear it told once again.

And we strain to listen, not just with our ears..but with our hearts...to be awakened just like those shepherds on that first night...

Do not be afraid, for see, I bring you good news of great joy for ALL PEOPLE. For, to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior....

The world Luke lived in when he committed this story into writing was a world where Dictators issued capricious rulings, causing innocent people to be marched homeless across the landscape and rounded up like cattle – even pregnant mothers – there is no way a story like this is going to last...it won't stand up to the test of the time...no way it will get traction.

One would not have been faulted for thinking that it's innocence will be drowned out...overwhelmed by the hard edges of reality...a story quickly dismissed and forgotten.

In those early years of the first Century, the midst to a world that was falling apart....where evil seemed to have its way...surely the world needed more than a story of a baby being born...and all the rest.

Here is what I think....

The story we tell this night comes from someone who knows us better than we know ourselves....from someone who knows that what this world needed then and ALWAYS is not one more loud, shrill, bombastic, heavy handed, show of force and fury....

The truth is, those who exercise that kind of power flare up and flame out...and their soon and long forgotten and dismissed. We don't need another version of that same old, predictable, tired, utterly forgettable story...

What we need is a story that
comes in close to us,
that gets inside of us...
under our skin...
that gets inside our situation...
and dwells there with us...
a story that has the power to awaken our souls...
maybe even save them.

The story we tell tonight defies all the odds...whenever we gather to hear it on a night like this, time itself feels sacred...this earth feels like holy ground...a chord of meaning is struck in our souls...that feels a lot like what we imagine hope to be.

It's power remains to gather in children and adults alike...believers and doubters (and if the truth be told, most of us are both)....

"this will be a sign for you....you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

Let this...I mean *THIS* (point to the crowd)...
be a sign for you....
whatever world you're in right now...
whatever the shape of the world in you...

Let this night be a SIGN for you....that this world,
your world, our world is a God graced, God inhabited world...This night tells the story
of a God who loved us enough to meet us, each one of us, in time and history...

And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,

*Glory to God in the highest!
Peace on earth, goodwill toward all!*

Say it after me:

Glory to God in the highest!
(*Glory to God in the highest!*)

Peace on earth!
(*Peace on earth!*)

Goodwill toward all!
(*Goodwill toward all!*)

It will never make it they said....it will never last.

There's no laughter track.
Just the sound of a baby crying in a manger...

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.

A blessed Christmas to all! Amen.