



REEL Christmas Week 3

Teaching Guide

Key Texts:

Luke 2:17-19, Philippians 2:6-7, 1 Peter 2:9-10

Key Challenge:

Christmas means that just because the decorations come down and routines get back to normal, that doesn't mean that we should ever stop proclaiming what God has done through Christmas, or pondering and treasuring what he has done for us.

Before starting the message, show the clip from Christmas Vacation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HkO5gtliYc>

[Leader note: Begin the message with an illustration about your most treasured Christmas memories. Below you'll see the story of the time a news reporter thought my cousin Stephanie had no legs. If you cannot find an illustration, feel free to use mine as something that happened to your friend Andrew.]

The Real: I Love Christmas! I know that most people are big fans, but I love everything about Christmas. I even like being at the mall around Christmas. That is probably because I worked at the mall all through out high school, and during the weeks before and after Christmas I worked way more hours than I did the rest of the year. Big crowds, cheesy pop songs, and food court dinners get me into the Christmas spirit. I think I love Christmas so much because of all of the great memories I have around Christmas.

I got married on December 17th. Do you know what your wedding theme is if you get married on December 17th? It's Christmas. The church was filled with poinsettias and gorgeous trees. We gave out hand painted ornaments to all of our guests, and at least a few times every year, someone tells us happy anniversary after they have decorated their tree with our ornament.

Growing up, Christmas was always the time I got to see all of my cousins, and I have a lot of cousins. They would come down to Florida, and because the weather was so much nicer than it was up north, we would spend almost every night outside looking at all of the Christmas lights. I grew up down the street from this house that went all out with their decorations. They had thousands of lights; crazy props in their yard, and every Christmas Eve Santa came to sit in their driveway to take the last minute requests from all of the neighborhood kids. It was a big deal; the local news would even feature this house every year as one of their “Holiday Houses to See.” Each year my family would walk down to that house after our big Christmas Eve dinner. One year my cousin Stephanie didn’t want to go because she was sick. We were finally able to convince her to come with us by offering to push her in a wheelchair. (It belonged to one of our older relatives who had already gone to bed.) This was one of those freezing cold Florida Crismasses. It was like 60 degrees. Stephanie was wrapped a blanket, but since it was so cold, she was also sitting on her legs to keep them warm. She looked very pale, because she has been sick all day, she was in a wheel chair, and had a blanket dangling from where her legs are supposed to be. When we got to the house, the news truck was already there doing their story and interviewing people about what they liked about this house. When the reporter saw a 10-year-old boy pushing an 8-year-old girl, with no legs, in a wheelchair, they ran over to interview us. The reporter acted like she was interviewing Tiny Tim. I remember saying “It’s been really tough this year, because we didn’t think she would be able to be here with us...” The reporter looked like she was going to cry, and my parents, aunt and uncle tried very hard not to laugh on camera. We still laugh about that every year.

The Rub: I think there is something unique about this time of year that makes our memories a little bit stronger. Have you ever noticed that? Do your Christmas memories seem to stick with you a little better than your memories from other times of the year? I’m not just talking about the happy memories either. For some people Christmas is the hardest time of year. I think that that is because they remember their negative experiences so much more vividly from around this time of year. The 4th of July never makes anyone depressed; no one ever falls into an Easter funk, but if you talk to a councilor, they will tell you that there are millions of people that become very depressed around Christmas.

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What is it about this season that makes us remember things? Maybe we take more pictures this time of year, or maybe there is something in the turkey that causes our memory centers to be more active. Whatever it is, some of our strongest memories revolve around Christmas.

The Read: One of my strongest Christmas memories is from 4th grade. My school always had a big Christmas production, and I really wanted the main role. It was as the rapping shepherd boy, who got to go see baby Jesus. I did not get the part; apparently my flow needed work. I got stuck with being “narrator 2.” There were 7 narrators. My lines consisted of 4 verses from Luke 2. So I decided that I would prove myself to the director, by memorizing all 7 of the narrator’s lines. And I still remember them.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. **2**(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) **3**And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.**4**And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) **5**To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. **6**And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. **7**And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.**8**And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9**And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. **10**And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.**11**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.**12**And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. **13**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,**14**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**15**And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.**16**And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the

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babe lying in a manger. Luke 2:1-16 (KJV). The last three verses in this passage are the one we are going to really focus on tonight. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:17-19 (NIV)

I think that this passage gives us two excellent ways that we can, and should, respond to Christmas.

Spread the word... When they had seen him, they **spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.** Luke 2:17 (KJV).

When these shepherds realized what had happened, they knew that they had no choice but to tell everyone who would listen what God had done. They had witnessed God himself, the creator and sustainer of the universe, in human form, and not the human form you would expect God to take. Living in Palestine in the 1st century, these men would have been very familiar with Greek culture. They would have heard of Hercules and Zeus; they were fabled god's that came down to earth, as might men, but this was not the form that Jesus took. He took the form of a baby. A lot of pastors talk about not truly understanding God's love until they became a father. That used to make me roll my eyes, until I got it. Almost five years ago, when Landon was only a few hours old, I was holding him in the hospital. Melissa was asleep, and there were no nurses in the room. It was just this little person and me. I looked down, and saw his toes, and just about lost it. They were so tiny; I had two thoughts at the same time. I thought "I could bite his pinky toe off with out even trying," and "God went out of his way to become this weak and tiny, because he loves me." This surge of emotion came over me as the familiar passage of Philippians 2:6-7 popped into my head. Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV). I was overwhelmed that God loved me enough to become a tiny, helpless, little person, and I got that holding my son, and if you know him you can tell, he is definitely not divine. The shepherds were there to see and touch and worship the incarnate Son of God! I think verse 17 is an understatement. I think "spread the word" just barely covers what was going on. I bet they were screaming at the top of their lungs to everyone who would listen. The Christ is here! A Savior has been born!

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2000 years later, that story may be more familiar, but it is no less miraculous! How can we do anything BUT spread the word that God loves you and me so much that he was willing to become a helpless baby, so that he could save me.

Treasure and Ponder-The second example that this passage gives as a way to respond to Christmas is found in verse 19; **But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:19 (NIV)** Don't you love how Luke sums up everything going on in Mary's head in 13 words? Oh you know, just had a first child, who happened to be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and I had him in a barn, after traveling on a donkey for a week straight. Yeah, 13 words should about do it. I think we get the treasure part. We are really great at treasuring memories, I just spent 10 minutes telling you about a Christmas when 10. We get what it means to treasure; but what about ponder? Luke is very careful to describe Mary's response to what has just happened to her as both treasuring and pondering. The word our Bible translates ponder is the Greek word *syballō*. This word is used 5 other times in the New Testament, but this is the only time there is only one person *syballō(ing)* if you will. The word is translated elsewhere conferred, or planned. It is used to describe the meeting of a king with his military advisors before going to war. And here we have Mary, *syballōing*, hosting a conference of ideas about what just happened in her head. I wish that Luke would have given us more than 13 words here, or maybe even included a chart to describe which things she was treasuring, and which exact things she was trying to wrap her brain around. Maybe she was saying to herself "The fact that Joseph did not break our engagement, treasure, the fact that a group of shepherds I have never met before showed up to meet my baby moments after he was born...that one I am going to have to think about." We don't have all the insight, but I like to speculate, that the thing she was having to wrap her brain around was that because of this baby, she had gone from obsolete peasant girl, to an heir of God. 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV) says this, **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.** Because of this baby, Mary had moved from peasant to priest. Because of Jesus, Mary who had never been worthy of God's mercy suddenly was.

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The Ready: That is something to ponder for sure! But do you know what, it is also an amazing memory for us to treasure. There are lots of things that I can't figure out, but why God would love me, is one that I doubt I will ever be able to grasp. I have several Christmas memories that I treasure, but none can even compare to the memory of when I learned that because of Jesus Christ I am chosen by God, he considers me to be a part of his Royal Priesthood, and because of Christ, He gives me his mercy. That is a memory to treasure.

The Response: Christmas means that just because the decorations come down and routines get back to normal, that doesn't mean that we should ever stop proclaiming what God has done through Christmas, or pondering and treasuring what he has done for us. I hope and pray that we will respond to Christmas as the shepherds who could not help but to spread the word concerning this child, and like Mary who both treasured the memories of Christmas, but also pondered how wonderful they were.

Prayer: Almighty God, Our thanks and praises do not even begin to describe how grateful we are for the gift of your son. God may we go from here and spread the word to all we meet concerning what we have been told about this child. And may we constantly ponder how great and deep is your love for us. We ask these things in the name of your son, who we celebrate today. Amen