

## **SCREEN: Merry Christmas!**

Well, again, Merry Christmas everyone!

It's no exaggeration to say that Christmas holds more power and emotion than any other holiday.

But ask a room of people what Christmas means and you'll get a ton of different answers.

The culture around us can help give us some answers--at least partial answers.

And for some people, a movie or book or tv show, maybe a popular song helps them understand Christmas.

Could be a movie like "It's a Wonderful Life" or "A Christmas Carol", or even

"A Christmas Story" currently on an endless loop on TV!

Maybe it's "The Grinch" or Hallmark's "A Princess for Christmas"? No, probably not!

For me, one of the first TV shows that helped me learn the meaning of Christmas was:

## **SCREEN: A Charlie Brown Christmas**

Anybody seen it? (raise hand)

Maybe I should ask, "*Anybody NOT seen it!*"

I've probably seen it 50 times.

It was first shown on TV on my birthday, the year I turned 7.

The year was 1965.

And I as a seven year old, I liked it because it was Peanuts, and a cartoon and it was about Christmas.

I was too young to get the deeper meaning.

And it is filled with meaning...was way ahead of its time.

But as I grew older, and with each passing year, the meaning resonated with me more and more.

It's one of my favorite Christmas stories,

and it is perfect for helping us understand this night.

Now, for the two of you sitting out there who are unfamiliar, the plot is simple.

Charlie Brown is searching for someone...*anyone*...to tell him the true meaning of Christmas.

He needs to know because he's confused.

He got a lot of mixed messages from his friends.

## **SCREEN: Snoopy**

Friends like Snoopy.

Snoopy thinks Christmas is all about the decorations---the trappings and commercialism.

That can't be right.

His sister Sally thinks it's all about how much money she gets---the materialism.

That's not right either.

So he goes on this search for the true meaning of Christmas.

Now right away, I can relate, I'm guessing you can too.

At this time of year we spend hours searching for the right gifts,  
the best sales...

we search for the perfect tree.

Maybe we search for that old box of ornaments put away for safekeeping.

Some folks search for a new cookie recipe or new theme for their Christmas party.

We might search for ways to make our homes and dinner tables  
look like what we find on Pinterest and Facebook.

It's a search for meaning and a search for the perfect Christmas.

But after hours, days, weeks of searching, running, and doing...  
we can end up feeling empty and unfulfilled.

That perfect gift we want is sold out,

the tree isn't straight,

maybe the cookies got burned and

our homes never look like the ones online.

Our search has left us with no breathing room and no closer to an answer to that question

Charlie Brown shouts, "can anybody tell me the true meaning of Christmas?"

### **SCREEN: Lucy**

When he turned to his friend Lucy and poured out his problem,

her advice was: 'get involved', do something, and take control of your situation.

How often do we do that?

Something's not working, we can't figure out why,

and decide we just need MORE...do more, work more, buy more, join more things,  
fill up all the hours of the day.

Charlie Brown tried to direct the school Christmas pageant.

But only ended up frustrated when he realized he couldn't control others---

they were all dancing to their own beat.

Boy, I can relate to that, can't you?

How often do you think,

*"if only my spouse or my children would do what I know they need to do..."*

It didn't work for Charlie Brown and it won't work for us, no matter how great our intentions.

### **SCREEN: tiny Christmas tree**

Now if you know the story, you know all about the Christmas tree.

Charlie Brown was sent off to find a tree, here's the one he picked out.

The smallest, weakest tree on the lot!

Because it wasn't what anybody expected----

didn't look anything like people thought

a Christmas tree should look--- he was ridiculed mercilessly.

In frustration, Charlie Brown cries out,

“Can anybody tell me the meaning of Christmas?!?”

And his friend Linus comes to the rescue and recites Luke’s Gospel,  
the very same Gospel we heard tonight.

The angel appeared to shepherds and announced...

**SCREEN:** “I bring you tidings of great joy,

**for today in the city of David**

**a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.**

**And you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger.”**

And that’s the meaning of Christmas; a simple truth,  
and a timeless message.

God looked down on earth, saw people who were weak and little and struggling...

like the tree Charlie Brown picked out... and loved them so much....

loved us so much...and said,

*“I’m going to help them...going to save them!*

And sent His Son.

And just like that Christmas tree Charlie Brown chose,

Jesus’ birth wasn’t anything like what people were expecting.

God could have chosen for His Son to be born anywhere, at any time.

But he chose the humblest way imaginable.

Born to a poor peasant girl, his birth in a lowly manger, with shepherds given the news.

And there is a beauty, a power and a joy in the first Christmas

that gives our Christmas today meaning.

We have to be careful, that we don’t miss the message.

We can easily get distracted, caught up in the trappings,

searching for Christmas in all the wrong places.

And the message of Christmas is the message for our entire lives.

God is teaching us to avoid the endless search for meaning in things that cannot

fulfill, cannot bring great joy, instead, wants us to look around, see the least among us,

those who are hurting, or alone, or ignored, or down on their luck,

and calls us to pick them, choose them and give them hope, just like Christ did for us.

And when we do that, when we see God present in the people around us,

when we look upon their faces and see the face of Christ,

we discover a joy a meaning and a purpose greater than any material gift.

Every single day, God is coming into our lives and saying, *“I’m here!*

*Pick me, choose me, love me!”*

This Christmas, let’s take a chapter out of Linus’ book,

let’s hear again those words the angel spoke to the shepherds:

**SCREEN:** **fear not, rejoice, a savior has been born for you!**

Do not be afraid---let go of your fears, your worries, your need for control,  
your pursuit of things that can't bring any lasting joy or peace...let go of it all...  
and find joy in the gift of God in Jesus Christ:  
the Son of God who came to save us and comes to us again this night.  
Let us remember the true meaning of Christmas!