

What is one thing that most Christmas movies have in common? If you believe and are a good, kind, and generous person, a miracle will happen, and everything will work out in the end—a noble ideal. However, we know that real life does not always work out that way. There is real pain and loss that do not go away, no matter how good we are or how strong we may believe.

Nevertheless, to some extent, these movies get something right; that is, everything will be well in the end (sometimes the very end). That is basically what the Bible teaches us. The message of the Bible unfolds telling us about God's power and goodness, the horrors of sin and evil, and stories of people who suffered yet overcame adversity because of their faith—even if it did not look like that at the time. Then it concludes in the Book of Revelation, highlighting that at the end, every tear will be wiped, pain and sorrow will no more, and even death will be defeated—if we believe (Revelation 21:4).

So, whether it is A Christmas Carol, The Polar Express, Elf, or the Book of Revelation, all of them echo the message of the story of Christmas: miracles do happen, life comes from faith, and in the end, everything will be made right. And this is what I want to talk about today: how God makes everything work out for good even if we can't imagine how life can be any good as we consider our circumstances.

For this, the narratives of Luke and Matthew give us insight into the miraculous birth of Jesus and the extraordinary circumstances that surrounded it. We will see that it was not just one miracle but a series of them working together. Here are the readings from the gospels of Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-25:

Luke 2:1-20,

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them."

Matthew 1:18-25

"Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus."

In our readings today from Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-25, we are brought into the very heart of the Christmas story. Luke's account provides us with a vivid portrayal of the circumstances of Jesus' birth. It sets the scene in Bethlehem, due to a decree from Caesar Augustus, highlighting the fulfillment of prophecy and the humility of Christ's birth in a stable since there was no room in the inn. This passage also recounts the angelic announcement to the shepherds.

On the other hand, Matthew's narrative digs into the personal story of Mary and Joseph. We see Joseph, a righteous man, grappling with the discovery of Mary's pregnancy. His resolve to quietly leave Mary is interrupted by a divine message in a dream, reassuring him of God's plan and the holy nature of Mary's pregnancy.

Together, these scriptures recount the events of Jesus' birth and reveal the profound and miraculous ways in which God's hand was at work. Namely, the birth of Jesus was not just a simple narrative of a single miracle but a complex series of miracles working together to accomplish God's purpose for humanity: to give us life through Jesus.

Now, to understand what this means, let's take a closer look at what is happening in the Christmas story.

Firstly, the Annunciation to Mary stands as a divine intervention, where a young woman in Nazareth is chosen to bear the Son of the Most High, defying the laws of nature. Following this, we witness Joseph's unwavering faith. With Mary's unexpected pregnancy, Joseph's resolve

to quietly part ways is overturned by a dream, a divine reassurance affirming his crucial role in this celestial plan. Then, their trials intensified as Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem. They traveled a long journey full of danger and challenging circumstances—like being pregnant. If that was not enough, they found themselves in a stable, a setting far from royal, marking Jesus' birth in the most humble circumstances. Furthermore, after Jesus's birth, King Herod adds a layer of complexity to the narrative. After learning about his birth and kingship from the wise men (not so wise at that moment), he sought baby Jesus to kill him.

What do these events teach us about miracles? Each of these events, the virgin birth, the revelation to Joseph in a dream, their journey to Bethlehem, the humble birth in a stable, the protection against the threat of death from Herod, and the announcement to lowly shepherds, all these are not mere coincidences but miraculous signs of God's active presence in our world. These miracles surrounding Jesus' birth highlight the way God works in the midst of adversity, turning humble and challenging circumstances into a magnificent display of his glory and love. They don't remove adversity or make life easier but give us the strength and wisdom to overcome. They remind us that power is made perfect in weakness.

Do you think Mary and Joseph thought any of these events were miraculous as they were happening? In hindsight, it is easy to see the miracles, but my guess is that was not what it felt to them. They were undoubtedly concerned and overwhelmed by what was happening to them and what might happen to their baby.

I think you know what I am talking about. Many of you have lived long enough to know that life sometimes is not a stroll in the park. It can be so challenging that believing in miracles can be difficult. Like Mary and Joseph, we face our trials — be it loss, grief, illness, or doubt. Consider how Mary, who later stood at the foot of the cross, knew the depths of human sorrow in ways we can't imagine. Yet, her faith endured not because God removed the pain but because God was with her, giving her the grace and strength to overcome it.

The point I am making here is that in our lives, it is all too easy to feel as though God is distant or unconcerned, especially when trials and tribulations surround us. Doubts creep in during times of suffering, persecution, illness, or the loss of a loved one. We might question, "Can I still believe in God?" "I am too sinful to believe; I am too hurt to believe; I have lost so much, how can I believe?"

Yet, this is where the true essence of the Christmas story resonates with our own experiences. The birth of Jesus, set against a backdrop of persecution and adversity, symbolizes far more than just a historical event; it represents a miracle of hope and resilience. Just as Mary and Joseph navigated their own trials, their story reminds us that even in the darkest moments, something miraculous is unfolding.

To make this point even more tangible, consider the miracles that quietly occur around us every day. A seed sprouting into a plant requires soil, sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide—a process so simple yet profoundly miraculous. Our very existence on Earth, perfectly positioned in the solar system, our atmosphere, and the magnetic fields that protect us—these are not mere

coincidences. They are manifestations of a universe intricately woven with miracles, a testament to God's love and grace. Everything about us and around us is many miracles working together.

Albert Einstein is believed to have said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is." This perspective aligns beautifully with the spirit of Christmas. It invites us to embrace the miraculous in every facet of our lives, recognizing the extraordinary in the ordinary. Miracles didn't just happen to Mary and Joseph; they are always happening around us, too. It could be in the form of an unexpected act of kindness, a sudden thought or realization that shifts our perspective, or even a sunrise that brings peace to our hearts.

With all this in mind, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let us open our hearts to this reality, choosing to see the miraculous in the mundane and the divine in the details of our lives. Let the story of Christmas be a reminder that even amidst adversity, life is replete with miracles if only we choose to see them.

So, may we live as if everything is a miracle, allowing the wonder of Christ's birth to renew our perspective, transform our hearts, and deepen our appreciation for the countless blessings that surround us each day. May this Christmas season renew our faith in the miraculous, reminding us that even in the most adverse circumstances, God's glory shines brightest, working in unexpected ways. May we, like the holy family, find strength and joy in the midst of our journey, however unpredictable it may be.

Let the miracle of Christ's love fill our hearts, not just today but in all the days to come.
Amen.