

Welcome

How messed up is that song?!

It's undeniably fun, but wow. The plot of the story is that Grandma got wasted at Christmas Eve, tried to walk home and was discovered dead the next day. The singer and his grandfather are convinced Grandma was run over by Santa's sleigh.

The end.

Uh.

Obviously, this song is a gag. It was actually written by a Dallas resident named Randy Brooks and first recorded by a comedy duo named "Elmo and Patsy" in 1979.

Brooks said he came up with the song when, at a Christmas party, he watched a relative who'd had too much to drink.

I don't want to make too much of a silly song that's clearly meant to be a gag in good fun. But I'm fascinated by the song's popularity. It's more than just the catchiness of the song.

It's also transgressive in the way good comedy is, working on several layers at once.

Christmas songs aren't supposed to be about death. Quite the opposite - Christmas is all about new life!

And the song is about a hit-and-run, but this one allegedly perpetrated by *Santa*?! Of all the things Santa Clause is known for, vehicular homicide isn't on the list.

All of that is underscored by the playful tune that's really at odds with the subject matter.

That surprise is where I want to hang out today. After all, it's Christmas Eve, and woven throughout the Christmas Story is surprise.

Today is also the fourth Sunday of Advent (more on that later). To begin worship today, I want to invite John and Vanessa Hewitt to light our fourth Advent candle!

Message

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, which is the beginning of the Church year. During Advent, we take four Sundays to prepare ourselves for Christmas. We prepare by remembering what our spiritual ancestors experienced as they waited for the arrival of God's promised champion.

We know that champion arrived as Jesus on that first Christmas. But we also know Jesus isn't done with the world, that he's going to return. So just like our ancestors prepared for Jesus to arrive that first Christmas, we're preparing for his return one day.

This year, our Advent series is called WORST CHRISTMAS SONGS EVER. We're taking some of the Christmas songs that get a lot of (usually justifiable!) hate and asking what we can learn from them. Why do people hate them so much? And how did they get so popular in the first place? Along the way, we'll find sitting with these songs might be an invitation to prepare our own spirits for the Christmas celebration.

We've explored the deep need we have for God in our world. We've learned how to resist using the sentiment of the season as a shield against pain. And last week, we saw how Christmas requires us to be vulnerable if we want to receive the hope at the heart of the season.

Now, today is Christmas Eve. But - because of the way the calendar fell, today is also the fourth Sunday of Advent. That's why we still haven't lit the Christ Candle yet. You'll have to join us tonight for that!!

So we're not *quite* to Christmas Eve and the celebration of Jesus' birth yet. As we're approaching our celebrations tonight and tomorrow, I want to invite you to consider how often our expectations of Christmas can get in the way of celebrating Christmas.

It's a Christmas movie cliché (think *Christmas Vacation* or basically any Hallmark Christmas movie) - we get so wrapped up in what we want Christmas to be that we miss the reality in front of us.

Cliches become cliché for a reason - and if we follow the trail of this one all the way back, we arrive in at a real danger: it's really, really easy for us to attach God to our own agendas, rather than letting God be God. But if the Christmas story reminds us of anything, it's that God is always going to be about God's plans for us.

Turn to [2 Samuel 7](#).

The books of Samuel tell the story of how David became King of Israel. But it's really also the story of how Israel became a nation. After their liberation from Egypt, the Israelites settled in Palestine as a loose confederation of tribes. This arrangement left individual tribes vulnerable to attacks from other nations.

In the opening of 1 Samuel, the tribes demand unification under a king - specifically, they want to be like the other nations around them. They end up with King Saul, who is replaced by David.

By this point in the story, David has gone from shepherd to mercenary to king. He's established, he's named Jerusalem as his capital and he's even built himself a palace.

What's key to remember here is that impulse Israel had to "be like everyone else". We see that play out again here, when David comes up with his plan to build a temple:

When King David was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies, the king summoned Nathan the prophet. "Look," David said, "I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!"

Nathan replied to the king, "Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you."

This seems pretty straightforward doesn't it? David built a house for himself, so now he's going to build a house for God. Of course, this isn't purely selfless. As king, this is a savvy political move for David. It appeases his people, reinforces God's approval of his right to rule.

And then there's Nathan, the court prophet. Again, it seems like a no-brainer for Nathan to give David God's seal of approval. Why *wouldn't* God say yes to this? He's a god. Gods have temples. And this particular god has been without a proper temple for way too long.

So... green light! (And, just like with David, this isn't totally altruistic... who wouldn't want to be the prophet who oversaw the construction of your god's temple? There's plenty of prestige and power that come with being That Guy.)

Both the prophet and the king agree this is the obvious next move. So imagine their surprise when God has a different idea:

But that same night the LORD said to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel's tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, "Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar house?"' — [2 Samuel 7:1-7](#)

God says, "Who do you think I am? I've never needed a temple. Why do you think I want one now?"

I'm fascinated that God doesn't even give a reason for a lack of interest in a Temple. God simply is wholly uninterested in being like the other deities. Which is the point, actually. God *isn't* like the other deities. God is wholly other. Wholly transcendent. Wholly God.

And God will not be domesticated by David's political agenda.

God will not be domesticated by Nathan's religious agenda.

God is about *God's* agenda. Not theirs. They've gotten too comfortable in their roles as king and prophet. They've forgotten their God is not like the other gods.

This comes as a stark reminder.

Can we pause here a moment to consider our agendas this Christmas season? Some of us have, no doubt, already had our plans disrupted. Some of us - I hate to break it to you - are in for disruptions to come. How often do we get so caught up in our holidays that we forget to ask what Jesus is up to? How often do we assume Jesus is fine with our agendas, rather than looking for how he is at work in and around us?

Song

What does Christmas look like when we're about our own agendas instead of attending to Jesus? It might look like waging the so-called War on Christmas in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Or it might look like buying, buying, buying in the name of the one who said, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Presents wrapped in the nicest bows are a poor substitute for what our loved ones really need - our physical presence.

It's worth remembering that first Christmas defied expectations, too. God's people anxiously awaited their champion, the Messiah. They knew he would be a descent of King David. But again, they let the ways of the world around them influence their expectations.

They imagined their champion would be born in a palace, the child of nobility. That he would be raised in power, trained to be a mighty general. That he would lead them out to conquer the armies of the world, greater than Caesar!

We know now that's not what happened. Not even close. Because even then, God still was not interested in being attached to a political or religious agenda of human making.

God's agenda was radically different. One of peace on earth, not eternal war. So God came not as a warrior but a baby. One of good news for all people, not just the wealthy. So God came poor, in a manger rather than a palace.

Friends, Christmas is proof of what God warned Nathan and David: God will not be attached to our agendas. God cannot be contained by our ambitions or our plans or our buildings.

The dream of Christmas is too big for our human imaginations. The very best we can imagine is a pale shadow of what God is up to in the Christmas story.

Christmas is God's affirmation that God's plans for us are always bigger than what we can imagine for ourselves. Can we trust that is true?

Communion + Examen

Jesus surprises us with a meal.

How has God been speaking to me during the Advent season?

Where has my agenda drowned out God's voice?

How can I make space to listen to God in the next twelve days?

Assignment + Blessing

At the beginning of this series, we met the God who dwells among the cherubim. We saw that God is dangerous - but that God is also good.

David and Nathan's encounter here with God reminds us yet again of God's goodness. Because God doesn't stop at chastising the prophet and the king for the plans they made without consulting God.

God goes on to promise David that God has something better in mind for David than a temple he built. God is building David an eternal house - a dynasty that will stretch into eternity:

"Now go and say to my servant David, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won't oppress them as they've done in the past, starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.'

“Furthermore, the LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings!” — 2 Samuel 7:8-11

We know that God was faithful in a way David never could have imagined - by God becoming part of David’s family.

Friends, as you go today, may you, too, know a God whose dreams are always bigger than ours.