

Someone to Believe In

Session 2 Friends and Enemies

To help our journey through Advent we are using the film *Miracle on 34th Street*. The book accompanying the series by Sheila Jacobs uses clips from the 1947 version of the film. But we will have clips instead from the 1994 version with Richard Attenborough. The premise of the film is that the elderly gentleman who takes over from the drunken Santa Claus for the department store acts as though he is Santa Claus. Being the USA, the holiday season kicks off with a Thanksgiving Parade organised by the department store. The organiser is Mrs Walker a single mother with a young daughter, Susan. Having been deserted by her former partner, she is wary about relationships and finds trusting difficult. We will watch a chunk of the film and after a brief reflection of what we have seen, we will split into groups to discuss a few of the themes that arise. After that we will come back together to share what we have learnt about Jesus and faith and how we can put our faith and trust in a someone rather than a something.

In this week's section of the film, we find the honesty and integrity of Santa Claus being challenged. The store where he works is being more successful than a rival opposite because they have the real thing. The rival store owner tries to discredit Santa Claus by bribing a disgruntled former Santa to make insinuating allegations in front of the children waiting excitedly to visit the store toy department. The real Santa Claus is then followed on the way home by the same person who continues to insult him. After much provocation, Santa Claus strikes the man with his cane which attracts a crowd. Eventually he is arrested and taken to a mental hospital to have his mental capacity checked – it is not every day that Santa Claus attacks someone. He deliberately fails the capacity check because he believes he has tarnished the reputation of the institution of Christmas and therefore should not be allowed to continue. Mr Bedford demands a court hearing to defend Santa Claus and represents him to the judge.

Bible passage

Matthew 2: 1-8, 13-16

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'

The escape to Egypt

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Discussion questions

1. In what do you truly put your trust, be honest!
2. Is feeling 'sorry' enough?
3. Is it alright to doubt – even your faith- when we have believed for years?
4. What kind of things can shake our faith in God?
5. How can we reach people with the gospel who haven't "believed in anything for years?"

In the film, the success of Cole's store is disturbing for the owner of the shop opposite, and he seeks for a way to get rid of him. There is the old saying that all is fair in love and war. Clearly, this tycoon sees business as being a war. Coles's Father Christmas is encouraging an antidote to that cut-throat attitude.

We see the same thing in the story of the Magi from Matthew's Gospel. They come and seek the new-born King, Jesus. But this brings doubt and uncertainty to Herod whose grip on Israel is always precarious. As a ruler only because of the power of the Romans, Herod can be displaced at any time. Any new ruler, even a helpless baby is a threat and should be disposed of quickly.

In our Christian lives we can see the struggle between good and evil played out before us. It is very easy for us to let our faith take a back seat especially if life is getting busier or more difficult for us. How do we keep our faith going when it is challenged? What practices can we put in place to deal with such times?

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, How good you are that you love us so much that you sent your son to save us and give us peace with you. Thank you for this Advent season when we remember how and why Jesus came. Help us to remember you and find your peacefulness among all the busyness. Father, we thank you that we have friends, but remember that we also have an enemy. Help us to be aware and watchful that we may stand firm in faith. Amen.