Last week I gave you an assignment. I asked you to be aware of all the Christmas Classic movies as they begin to appear again on our TV channels. As you do, ask yourself what is the message of Christmas that is offered in these presentations? If all you knew about the season came from these classic movies, what would you deduce is the reason for the season?

Last Sunday we considered the movie It’s A Wonderful Life. Today, I want us to remind ourselves of the 1966 animated movie How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Written by Dr. Seuss in 1957, this classic has amused audiences annually ever since it was first aired. In typical Seuss style, with strange characters and customs, this film adaptation of the poem actually gets us closer to the real meaning of Christmas than many of the other classics.

Of all those movies I remember, one that gets a bit closer to the reason for the season yet still manages to miss it is this one. Let’s visit the star of the movie, the Grinch, and see his problem.

[Being with a quote from the poem.]

Every Who down in Who-ville liked a Christmas a lot…
But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville did NOT!

The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season!
Now, please don’t ask why. No one quite knows the reason.
It could be his head wasn’t screwed on just right.
It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were tight.
But I think that the most likely reason of all
May have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

But, whatever the reason, his heart or his shoes
He stood there on Christmas Eve, hating the Whos,
Staring down from his cave with a sour, Grinchy frown
At the warm lighted windows below in their town.
For he knew every Who down in Who-ville beneath
Was busy now, hanging a mistletoe wreath.

“And they’re hanging their stockings!” he snarled with a sneer
“Tomorrow is Christmas! It’s practically here!”
Then he growled, with his Grinch fingers nervously drumming
“I MUST find some way to stop Christmas coming!”

This becomes the theme of the movie. The Grinch is obsessed with keeping Christmas from coming to Who’-ville. His plan was to turn their excitement into disappointment, and their singing into wailing. He would take all their presents, their food, their lights and trees. Why? Why would he do that? Because the Grinch HATED Christmas!

It seems like Christmas has always had that kind of effect on some people. In our present age, Christmas is so disliked by some people that groups like the ACLU have threatened people with lawsuits if there’s even a mention of Christ in the season of Christmas.

About 10 years ago, Broward County (Florida) told the Calvary Chapel there that they could not include the words: “Jesus is the Reason for the Season” in their outside Christmas display. So the church filed a suit in the U.S. District Court claiming they had the right to display the words.
Judge William Zloch agreed with their “free speech” argument and allowed them to keep the words in their display as long as they included the words, “Calvary Chapel says,” before the words “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.”

Even though 90% of Americans celebrate Christmas, and even though Christianity is the largest religious group in the nation, “Jesus” has been repeatedly forced into the closet during this season. So much so that the very word “Christmas” has been removed from the season and replaced by the term “Happy Holidays.” We put up “holiday trees” and give “holiday presents.” Why? What’s the holiday? No one knows! If we don’t do all we do at Christmastime because of Jesus … then why do we do it at all?

Just recently I read about a school in Chicago – which recently staged their holiday program celebrating Hanukkah and Kwanzaa … but excluded any reference to Christ and the Christmas story. It was a holiday program without a reason to celebrate.

Back in 1991, humorist Dave Barry poked fun at all of this when he wrote: To avoid offending anybody, the school dropped religion altogether and started singing about the weather. At my son’s school, they now hold the winter program in February and sing increasingly non-memorable songs such as “Winter Wonderland,” “Frosty the Snowman” and -- this is a real song – “Suzy Snowflake,” all of which is pretty funny because we live in Miami. A visitor from another planet would assume that the children belonged to the Church of Meteorology.

I. There’s something about the story of the birth of Christ that creates animosity. Have you noticed that? But what? What is it about the birth of a baby thousands of years ago that upset people so much?

James Martin is a contributor to the devotional book The Upper Room. He wrote, “On a trip to the Holy Land, I bought a nativity set for my Sunday School. Carved out of olive wood in Bethlehem itself, the crèche had all the traditional figures – sheep and oxen, wise men and shepherds. Mary and Joseph and, of course, the baby Jesus.

“For the return trip, security at Tel Aviv airport was very strict. I remember thinking they would not trouble to examine my nativity set; it was obviously innocent. But they did. Each figure was carefully scrutinized and even taken away for x-ray examination.

“‘You see,’ said the security officer, ‘we must make sure there is nothing explosive in them.’”

That is the problem! There is something EXPLOSIVE in the story of Jesus. And nowhere is that explosiveness more obvious than the biblical story of Herod.

READ Matt. 2:1-20  PRAY

King Herod was King of the land of Israel in the day when Jesus was born. But he wasn’t King by right of birth. He wasn’t an Israelite; he was from Edom. He was ruler of the land only because Rome had given him the throne.

He called himself “Herod the Great” and in some ways he was a “great king.” He did some amazing things.
- He had doubled the size of the Temple
- Built numerous palaces and fortifications
- Kept the area of Palestine at a relative peace with its neighbors
- And – when a famine had devastated Israel – he purchased food for his starving people with money from his own treasury.

So why would a successful, wealthy, compassionate king be so upset with a baby born in Bethlehem? So upset that he was willing to massacre every child in this village to make sure he had destroyed that one single helpless child?
Actually, Scripture doesn’t tell us why, but history gives us a pretty good picture of this wicked King’s motivation. You see, Herod had a reputation for jealously protecting his power and position. In all honesty, he was a paranoid maniac with no conscience at all!

- When his 16 year old bro-in-law tried to make a name for himself Herod playfully held the boy’s head under water until he drowned.
- Years later, one of his many his wives, Mariamne, became involved in a plot to have her family rise to power. Even though he loved her deeply, he had her executed. He did however name a beautiful tower in her honor. How sweet!
- And, a couple of years before his death, he heard rumors that two of his sons, Aristobulus and Antipater, were engaged in a plot to kill him – he had them executed as well.

History records that Caesar Augustus commented: “It is safer to be Herod’s pig than to be Herod’s son.”

History also tells us that Herod knew he was hated, but he wanted his kingdom to grieve when he died. He arranged for his personal army to round up all the leaders of the city upon his death, bring them to the hippodrome and have them executed. That way their would be weeping and grief in Jerusalem when he died. Fortunately, his captains did not carry out his order.

Herod’s driving motivation was to “stay in control” of his life. Anything or anyone that threatened this authority faced his wrath. He would do anything in his power to destroy whatever endangered his ability to stay in control of his life.

So is it any wonder that, when the wise men from the East showed up at his palace seeking the newborn king of the Jews that Herod went berserk? He sensed another threat to his throne, and he would deal with this one just as deviously and violently as he had in the past. The wise men had no idea who they were dealing with!

II. Herod’s motivation goes to the heart of why so many others oppose Christmas.

People embrace Kwanzaa which is a celebration created by and for the black community today.
They’ll embrace Hanukkah … a religious holiday celebrated by the Jewish community.
But let someone bring up the story of Jesus - and watch the fireworks begin
Why? Because people have a problem with the baby Jesus! The heart of the problem is a problem of the heart. In the words of Dr. Seuss as he described the Grinch, his heart was 2 sizes too small.

Herod’s heart was too small for anyone other than himself to rule in his life. There was no room.
And that’s why so many others today reject the Christ child. To acknowledge Him to be what the Christmas story says He is would be to acknowledge that Jesus has a right to our hearts and minds. But there’s no room in the hearts of many for that message. There’s no room in their hearts for God to reign.

Though Dr. Seuss did not present the Christ of Christmas in his poem, he did point out the problem people have with the Christ of Christmas. They jealously guard the control of their lives. There is no room behind the wheel for anyone but themselves. The very thought that the Christ Child has any right to correct, criticize, order, guide, or in any way influence their independent lives is an abomination!

Did you know that the Christmas carols we sing so often are offensive to non-Christians? We don’t often give much thought to those words because we’ve sung them so often … but I want you to give serious thought to the meaning of the following carols that we sing.

What Child is this, who laid to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud, the Babe the Son of Mary.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him born the King of angels.
O come let us adore Him, o come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Did you catch the message in these songs?
- “Christ the King”
- “King of Angels”
- “Newborn King”
- “God and sinners reconciled”

In these hymns Jesus is receiving the praise of both men and angels. Christmas Carols declare the divinity of Christ. They literally shout out that Jesus is the Son of God born to be King of our lives… and the KING of the lives of others as well. They announce His lordship over our lives.

Such a suggestion goes against what modern man holds most dear, that he is captain of his fate and master of his soul!

III. So then, how do we change hearts of those who don’t want Jesus/ King in their lives? How do we change the size of their hearts?

(CLIP FROM MOVIE from the top of Mt. Crumpit to the end which reads as follows):
Three thousand feet up! Up the side of Mt. Crumpit,
He rode with his load to the tiptop to dump it!
“Pooh-Pooh to the Whos!” he was ginch-ish-ly humming.
“They’re finding out now that no Christmas is coming!
“They’re just waking up! I know just what they’ll do!
“Their mouths will hang open a minute or two
“Then the Whos down in Who-ville will all cry BOO-HOO!

“That’s a noise,” grinned the Grinch, “That I simply MUST hear!”
So he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear.
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.
It stared in low. Then it started to grow…

But the sound wasn’t sad– Why, this sound sounded merry!
It couldn’t be so! But it WAS merry! VERY!
He stared down at Who-ville! The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!

[Start the video]
Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN’T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME
Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: “How could it be so?
“It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
“It came without packages, boxes or bags!”
And he puzzled 3 hours, till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before!
“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “Doesn’t come from a store.
“Maybe Christmas… perhaps… means a little bit more!”

[Back to live]
And what happened then…?
Well… in Who-ville they say that the Grinch’s small heart grew 3 sizes that day!
And the minute his heart didn’t feel quite so tight,
He whizzed with his load through the bright morning light
And he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast!
And he… HE HIMSELF…!
The Grinch carved the roast beast!

Do you realize what a beautifully theological story this is?
What changed the heart of the Grinch? It wasn’t the ribbons, it wasn’t the tags. It wasn’t the packages, boxes or bags.
It was the witness of the people down in Who-ville …the witness of people that the Grinch had always hated because of the Christmas they celebrated. It was their singing and their joy that changed the Grinch.
A lady in a former church served on many civic committees, and was asked to select carols suitable for a community Christmas-tree lighting. She sought the help of her minister of music. But, when she scanned the list he had selected, she was dismayed. In frustration she cried: But they’re all so theological."
Yeah, they are, aren’t they? But this woman had missed the point of those songs. Christmas for her organization wasn’t about Jesus.
Her kind of Christmas singing would never change the heart of a Grinch.
Her kind of Christmas singing would never change the world because her kind of Christmas music would never challenge people to change the size of their hearts.
Holy Spirit is calling us to sing! To sing out the message of Christ! He wants us to sing long and loud, without fear or intimidation. He wants us to use our voices to proclaim that Jesus has come to love and redeem! He challenges us today to share how our lives have been transformed by His grace.
It’s only the story of a changed heart that makes any difference in this world. When Christ is Lord in a person’s life, even when great tragedies come, there is peace and joy to see them through.

Max was a man I knew when I was in seminary. I pastored a small church just south of the airport in Louisville, KY. I learned of Max when a neighbor told me that Max’s hand had been caught in a press at work and he lost most of three fingers. Already a bitter and spiteful old man, even his wife was having trouble living with him in his misery.
As our relationship grew, I had the joy of leading Max to faith in Christ. His whole attitude and outlook on life changed! This old miser became the most benevolent soul you would ever meet. He was first in line to help with any ministry we attempted.
What had changed? Much like the transformed Grinch, Jesus enlarged his heart. Once Max made room for Jesus in his life, the Lord expanded his capacity to love exponentially. Max spent the remainder of his life serving the Christ who had set him free from himself.
This world has a problem with Jesus because they have no desire for a savior or lord! To even recognize that Jesus was born is a pill to bitter to swallow. But like the innkeeper in Bethlehem, if they will only make room to receive the Christ-Child, miracles will follow.