

THE DRAMA OF CHRISTMAS

THE LINES

Effective dramas are full of memorable lines.

Here are a few famous movie lines. See if you can recognize the flicks from which they come...

“So let it be written. So let it be done.”

That’s Pharaoh Yul Bryner, *The Ten Commandments*

“Go ahead, make my day.”

Dirty Harry or Clint Eastwood

“Here’s looking at you kid.”

Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*

“I’ll be back.”

Arnold Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator*.

“To infinity... and beyond!”

Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story*.

“May the Force be with you.”

Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*.

“I feel the need, the need for speed.”

Tom Cruise in *Top Gun*.

“There’s no place like home.”

Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Build it, and they will come.”

The voice from the cornfields in *Field of Dreams*.

And here’re two lines from one movie... “After all, tomorrow is another day..” Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone With The Wind*. And the last line from the same movie. Rhett Butler, “Frankly my dear, I don’t give a doggone.”

Whether you're talking movies, or plays, or real-life dramas - effective stories are full of unforgettable lines... *as was God's original Christmas drama...*

God's Christmas narrative is packed with quotations we recall year after year, generation after generation...

Classic lines came from the mouths of *angelic messengers* - and from *a little girl named Mary* - and from *oriental wise men*... The drama of Christmas wouldn't be complete without the statements that sum up its meaning, and clarify its life-changing message!

When God staged the Christmas drama He did it right! Nothing in the story happened by accident. Every detail was thought through and planned out...

And the same was true with the script - each word was carefully crafted by the master wordsmith Himself, the Holy Spirit. Each line made a crucial point!

This year, we're studying **the drama of Christmas**.

In our first study we discussed the **cast of Christmas**. Last week we examined the **sets of Christmas**. Today, we want to look at **the Script** or **lines of Christmas**.

For decades American families have sent Christmas cards during the holiday season. Every year two billion Christmas cards are mailed to American mailboxes, and another half-a-billion e-cards get sent online.

In fact, the President alone will mail over 40,000 Christmas cards... *and we get to pay the postage!*

I think sending Christmas cards has been such a popular practice because we all sense intuitively that Christmas is the perfect time to make a statement.

For years I've had a personal Christmas tradition.

On Christmas Eve Day I get my phone directories and browse through the names of friends and former acquaintances. I call folks who I haven't spoken to in awhile - and try to refresh some former relationships...

Hey, **there is something about Christmas that makes it the perfect time to make a statement.**

I heard of a particular town that had a custom.

At Christmas everyone gave a present to their trash collector. Some of the collectors began to expect the gift. They taped cards to the trash cans on their route, "**Seasons Greetings from your trash collector.**"

One man though forgot to respond to his trash collector's greeting card. The day before Christmas another note was taped to his garbage can... "**Seasons Greetings from you trash collector. SECOND NOTICE.**"

Christmas is a good time for making statements.

Just so you'll know where I'm headed - I've surveyed the Christmas story and lifted out some memorable lines... statements God made *to us* and *through us*...

And by looking at God's Christmas statements I hope to encourage you to make a few statements of your own to the people that you love this Christmas...

Did you hear about the little boy who approached his dad with three pieces of paper? He held up the first paper, and said, “Dad, fax this list to Santa Claus.”

He sat the second paper down in front of his dad, and asked him, “Will you please e-mail this list to God.”

But the third piece of paper remained clutched in the little guy’s hand. His instructions were clear, “And with this list, please, I want to talk to grandma direct!”

Well, after today’s message, I’m trusting that this Christmas you’ll want to talk to a few people direct...

Hopefully, you’ll want to make a statement to **God**.

Maybe it's time your **wife** heard a little more from you than a grunt at breakfast - or a snore at night.

I know you told her you loved her when you married her, but that’s been a few years ago now... Perhaps, it’s time to tell your wife again how much you care.

I’ll bet your **kids** could use a reminder of how much you love them... *And you kids*, I’m certain **mom and dad** could stand to hear a little appreciation come from your mouth for all they’ve done and are doing for you...

For all of us, sometimes the best presents come in the form of heartfelt statements. And Christmas is a time for giving expression to our feelings. *We learn that from the statements God made that first Christmas...*

This AM we’re looking at the lines of Christmas... **seven famous lines** from the drama of Christmas...

The first statement comes from the mouth of an angel. In Matthew 1:20-21 one appears to a confused Joseph with an explanation, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Sometimes what we need most is *an explanation!*

Once, one of our ushers started finding beer cans and liquor bottles in the youth pastor's trash can.

Roy came to me worried. He said, "I think Pastor Jeff has a drinking problem." I assured Roy we didn't have a pastor snorting in the office. Jeff was in charge of picking up the trash off the front lawn, and he was depositing the empty bottles in his waste basket.

All Roy needed to calm down was an explanation!

That was also true of the wife who found \$500 cash stuffed in her husband's sock. It was hidden deep in his chester drawers. She assumed the worst. When he got home that night she let him have it with both barrels!

She was embarrassed to discover her husband's stash was money he was saving to buy her a special Christmas gift. *Often, all we need is an explanation.*

And this was the case with Joseph. His fiancée' was pregnant, and Mary expected him to believe a preposterous story about it all being the work of God.

Joseph was plotting how to terminate the betrothal, when suddenly an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and provided him the explanation he needed.

This Christmas might be the perfect time for you to sit down and give someone you love an explanation.

You've assumed your kids understand the reasons for your rules and your concerns - *but maybe they really don't, and if they did they'd be better received.*

Perhaps your parents need a reminder that you still love them, even though you don't have as much time to see them anymore... Or a smoldering resentment could be doused by giving your friend an explanation for your perceived slight - or your odd actions...

The angel explained to Joseph that Mary's story was true. The Holy Spirit had overshadowed the young girl. The child had been sired by the power of God.

I'm sure God's explanation didn't answer all Joseph's questions, but it let him know Mary had been faithful to him - and God loved them - and by choosing Joseph to rear His Son, God had bestowed on him a great honor.

An explanation might not satisfy *all* the objections, but at least it's an effort to foster peace, and love, and understanding. As with Joseph, often an explanation is the difference between people *going on* or *giving up*.

But also notice the Christmas statement made by the magi in Matthew 2:2. When they arrived in Israel they figured surely the local authorities would be aware of the important birth of

the promised King. They came to King Herod and inquired of him, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

The angel's words to Joseph were a *calming explanation* but these words are a *rousing declaration*.

The wise men have traveled over high mountains - across steep valleys - from deep within the oriental east to the shores of the burgeoning west - and all for one reason... *they want to worship the newborn King!*

This Christmas maybe its time for you to come out with a **declaration** of your own. Stand up and make a definite statement *to God, your family, your coworkers, your friends, even your neighbors - to the whole world for that matter* - that you're going to worship Jesus!

There are *wives* here today who've been praying for years to hear their husbands say, "This Christmas we're going to worship Jesus..." There're *kids* who would love to hear their parents tell them, "We've been majoring on the minors. We need to worship Jesus..."

I assure you there are *parents* here who would jump for joy to hear their kids say, "Mom, dad, I'm tired of my selfish attitude. I just want to worship Jesus!"

And there's a *Father in heaven* who loves you so much He's sitting on the edge of His seat - His ear is bent toward earth - waiting to hear some awakened heart speak up in faith, and make the declaration, "I've come to worship Jesus!" To make that kind of statement may be the best Christmas present you give!

Let me share an insight I glean from the wise men's declaration. They say, "We have come to worship Him."

To worship Jesus you have to come to Him. You have to make a move toward God. You come by leaving where you're at, and getting to where He is.

Real worship meets the Lord on His terms!

Singer Susan Ashton wrote a song that was popular years ago. It contained a line addressed to God. She sang, "*I can't go with You and stay where I am, so You move me.*" Understand, this is the prerequisite for worship, "**I can't follow Jesus and stay where I am.**"

And there's no better time than Christmas to make a bold move toward Jesus - to firmly declare that you're willing to come to Him on His terms - *that you're willing to bend your will, open your heart, worship the King!*

Christmas is a good time to make that statement.

Well, in Luke 1:31-33 an angel speaks again. Another statement is made, but this time it's to Mary - and the angel delivers to her a word of **expectation**...

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

The angel fills Mary's imagination with wonder. He gives a glimpse of Who her Son will be. And the first clue to His destiny comes from His name, **"JESUS."**

I've been keeping a list of entrepreneurs who have devised clever names for their companies. Names that reveal the nature of their business in catchy ways...

For example, there is an Indian fast food restaurant in New York City named, **"Curry in a Hurry..."** How about the store in Alameda, California that sells maternity clothes. It's called, **"Fashion After Passion..."**

A hairstyling salon in Dumas, Texas goes by the name, **"Curl Up and Dye..."** A portable toilet company in Parlin, New Jersey is called **"Johnny On The Spot..."**

There's a computer repair shop called **"Bits And PCs."** Lastly, how about the hot dog stand in Colorado that goes by the name, **"Mustard's Last Stand..."**

God gave to His Son a name that communicated in a nutshell the nature of His business. The Greek name **"Jesus"** is a translation of the Hebrew word **"Yeshua."** It means, **"Yahweh is salvation."** This is why the angel declared to Joseph, **"you shall call His name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins."**

If you've got any doubts as to what business Jesus is in, lay them to rest. He's in the *business of forgiveness.*

He loves us, and He's dying to prove it... *If there's a tree in heaven, He's carved your name in its trunk. If God has a refrigerator, your photo is taped to its door.*

Jesus loves you, and He'll wash away your sin - if you just ask Him... If you'll lay aside your agenda and your demands... and come to Him and worship!

But the angel's statement to Mary provided her with even loftier aspirations for her Son. He said of Jesus, "*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.*" Jesus is both *the offspring of God* and *the descendant of David* - and that combination makes Him the King who will rule over God's forever Kingdom.

No mother has ever had greater reason to have high expectations for her son. God not only calmed the fears of Joseph and Mary with an *explanation* of what had happened - but He peaked their *expectation*, by giving them a vision of Who this Child would become!

And here's a lesson for us. God is teaching us that **there is power in good and godly expectations...**

I'm sure over the years, Joseph and Mary never lost sight of their Child's true identity, and ultimate mission.

No doubt, when changing diapers, or warming bottles, or cleaning skinned knees got old - they would think back to the angel's statement of expectation, and recall how strategic their parenting really was...

This Christmas you could make a vital statement by sitting down, and refocusing on the expectations God has put in your heart for you and your family...

So often we get caught up in the daily grind, and forget the impact of our parenting, or our witness, or our service, or the influence of our church. Little acts of daily sacrifice add up. *It's how God changes the world.*

We need reminders that God has designed us for eternal purposes. There's more to our lives than trying to find a parking space at a crowded shopping mall.

We'll endure difficulties - and we'll press on when the road gets tough... *only when we recall where the road leads.* God desires for our lives to count for eternity.

God has great expectations for each of us.

Speaking of soul-teaching lines, to me Luke 1:38 is the most challenging of all the lines in the Christmas script. This time it's Mary who makes a bold statement.

She surrenders to God's will when she says, "**Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.**" Here's a statement of **dedication**.

Imagine the curveball God threw Mary... Here's a 15, 16 year-old girl, engaged to be married. Her hopes and dreams are all planned out, when news breaks, that irreversibly changes the trajectory of her life.

Mary could've questioned the will of God, or bucked at obedience, but she does neither. *There's not the slightest squirm in Mary's response.* As soon as God's will is revealed - she gives it all up, she lays it all down, she surrenders all her hopes, and dreams, and plans, and ambitions to the good pleasure of God.

And do I really need to draw an application?

Are we as ready and willing to let God have His way with us - even if it reverses or spoils our plans?

Author John Powell recounts the care he gave his elderly mother. Her home in Chicago included a staircase. John would carry her up and down the stairs.

But on occasion, Mom would grab the banister and refuse to turn loose. When she did, John would say, “Mama, let go of the banister or we can’t move.” She’d look at him and confess, “*But I’m afraid you’ll drop me.*”

John would reply, “Okay Mama, I’m going to drop you right now. When I count to three, I’ll drop you!” Of course, mom let go of the banister, and he’d be able to move two more steps, until she grabbed hold again.

John Powell sums up his story, “This is in microcosm my interaction with God. I’m hanging on to the banisters of life. I’m hanging on to these little things that make me feel secure. But God loves me more than I love my little mother, and God would never let me come to any harm. God knows where we’re going.”

Mary turned loose of the banister. Though God was taking her in a direction she didn’t understand, she was confident He would never drop her. *Is your faith strong enough to turn loose of the old supports, and surrender to God’s will?* Don’t you know He loves you? That God has big, strong arms. He’s never been guilty of a drop.

If you're not growing - if you're not on the move spiritually - it's probably because you've yielded to your fears and you're clutching on to the banisters of life.

Hey, the most important statement any of us can make this Christmas is to surrender to God's will, *"Let it be to me, according to your word."* This Christmas may we all make a renewed statement of *dedication* to God.

Then there's another statement from the lips of Mary. It's an utterance of praise and *adoration*. Bible scholars call it by a special name, *Mary's Magnificat*.

Luke 1:46-55 is Mary's song, *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

Some of the early missionaries to India were warned by William Temple not to read Mary's Song of Praise in public. He knew the authorities, and the social order they supported would be threatened by its contents.

The missionary knew the words, *“He has scattered the proud... put down the mighty... exalted the lowly...”* would be viewed as inflammatory, even treasonous.

Hey, real praise, true adoration is revolutionary. For it recognizes that **with the coming of the Messiah it's no longer business as usual on planet earth.**

Mary's song makes it clear that the Son of God will one day upset the apple cart. He'll turn the establishment on its ear. *He'll put down the mighty men, and exalt the humble, and scatter the proud, and lift up the lowly, and fill the hungry with good things.*

Christmas makes the statement, **“don't revolt against God, be a revolutionary for God.”** Mary's song of pure praise makes a radical statement wherever it's played.

At Christmas time I often mourn the commercialism that dominates American life. The song of Mary's praise seems to get drowned out by shopping jingles.

And we assume the commercialization of Christmas is a modern malady. *It's actually been happening for many years.* In the 1890s a Christian group wanted to publish a book of favorite hymns, but lacked the funds.

A company, Beecham's pharmaceuticals, agreed to help the church print their hymnal, but unbeknownst to them, Beecham slipped in a little free advertising...

When Christmas rolled around, and the Church sang the carol, *“Hark the Herald Angels Sing,”* they noticed a change in the lyrics. The songbooks now read, **“Hark! The herald angels sing, Beecham's pills are just the thing; peace on earth and**

mercy mild, two for man and one for child...” The advertisers strike again!

My point, and I believe Mary’s point, is that Jesus should be getting all the free advertising at Christmas!

Christmas is a good time to stand up in the midst of the world’s crass commercialization, and make a statement of pure praise and **adoration** toward God.

Our last two lines in the Christmas script were uttered by the angels over the shepherd’s fields on the outskirts of the little Jewish town known as *Bethlehem*.

Luke 2:10-11 records the angel of the Lord as he comforts the stunned shepherds, “**Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**”

Notice, the news they received was considered *good news*. The angel labeled it, “***good tidings of great joy.***”

And that point is not to be taken for granted. If God had not calmed our fears, we would’ve had reason to be leery of His arrival. *What if He wanted to get even?*

What if God had come to punish mankind? Surely, He had just cause... *But no!* The angel tells us to relax, chill! Christmas is a time for comfort and **affirmation**.

God is angry at sin, but He still loves the sinner.

In his book, “*What’s So Amazing About Grace?*,” author Philip Yancey tells the story of Mel White.

At one time Mel traveled in conservative Christian circles. He helped write for popular Christian speakers.

That ended when Mel came out as homosexual.

Some Christians sent Mel hate letters. They called him awful names, and labeled him *“an abomination.”*

A reporter traveled to Mel’s home, where he grew up, to interview his Christian parents. Mel’s mother was asked, *“Do you view your son as an abomination?”*

This godly mother, who would never condone her son’s sinful lifestyle, replied as only a mom can, *“Well, he may be an abomination, but he’s still my pride and joy.”* What a blessed mixture of hate for the sin, yet love for the sinner! And this is how God loves us.

He hates my sin, but He loves me.

That’s why Christmas is reason to rejoice. It’s a time to affirm our love to the people in our life who are living short of our expectations - even outside of God’s will!

Perhaps there’s a fellow sinner living near you who’s been blatant about their wicked lifestyle. And in your interaction with them you’ve had to take a stand for truth. As a result, it’s put a strain on your relationship.

You love this person - but you can’t stand by and watch them mock what you know is true, and ridicule Who you know to be God. You’ve taken an important stand, *but maybe this Christmas it’s time to go back to that person and also make a statement of affirmation.*

Why not let that person know that despite what they’ve done, God still loves them - and so do you...

Jesus came to save sinners, not condemn them.

The coming of Christ into the world - the Christmas message - was summarized by the angels as, “good tidings of great joy”! I believe Christmas is the perfect time to affirm God’s great love to even the unlovable.

There’s a final statement made by the angels - this time by a host of angels. In Luke 2:14 an angelic chorus serenades the shepherds. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Here’s a word of **anticipation**. *Peace is coming. Good will is on its way...* Good times are about to roll...

Of course, 2000 years later, this world is the same conflict-ridden place the shepherds had experienced - *where is this peace on earth and goodwill to men?*

It reminds me of the family that celebrated Christmas with an advent candle - four candles representing the spirit of Christmas: *hope, love, peace, and joy*.

Each week prior to Christmas they lit a different candle and recalled the tradition and symbolism.

Finally the time came to light the fourth candle... The father asked his very talkative teenage daughter to recount what the four candles represented. She spit out the first three, “**hope... love... peace...**” But she stumbled on the fourth candle. It was definitely a rare occasion when this young lady was at a loss for words.

She was still groping for the answer when her little brother jumped in, “**hope, love, peace, AND QUIET.**”

I laugh whenever I see one of those bumper stickers that ask me to **visualize World Peace**. Sorry, but I'm not that ambitious. **Someone wants world peace, when I can't even find a little peace and quiet in the world.**

God's promise of peace and goodwill seems as far-fetched today as when first uttered by the angels.

Realize, the Christmas drama conveys hope. It's not an instant cure-all. Christmas is not about *harvesting a crop* - it's about *planting a seed*. It's not the culmination of change, but the genesis of changes yet to come.

The message of Christmas is that peace on earth and goodwill toward men are on the way!

In His own time, and in His own way, the Savior will bring it to pass! Christmas stirs up hope and faith!

A rich, white South African repented of his racism, and offered help to the poor, black village of Ndotsheni.

He promised earthmoving equipment to build a dam that would supply year-round water and irrigation. With a new dam the townsfolk could raise cattle, and provide food and milk for their kids. No longer would their young have to move to the cities to find work.

At the mere mention of the man's name there was joy. Singing, dancing were in the streets of Ndotsheni.

A resident said, **"Although nothing has happened yet, it's as if it had. Something is here already."** And that was hope! Hope had come to the impoverished town.

On the day this baby was born in Bethlehem, in a sense nothing had changed. *An evil King Herod was still on the throne - wicked men continued having their way - Israel remained under Roman occupation.*

But in another sense everything changed! Christmas is the evidence that a better world is on the way.

The King has come. Hope is born. A new world is now visible... *even if only in a baby.* And because of Jesus' grand arrival the future is forever altered. Just His name causes singing and dancing in our hearts.

And since Christmas is a statement of hope and **anticipation** - *this year why not give the gift of hope?*

None of us have the resources to solve the totality of even one person's troubles - let alone the problems of our community or our county, *but we all can sow hope!*

We can all act in loving and sharing ways - and show this hope-starved world that Jesus makes a better life!

Oh, the lines of Christmas: memorable, unforgettable statements of **explanation declaration, expectation, dedication, adoration, affirmation, and anticipation.**

I think it's all a cause for a **celebration!**

Let's call it Christmas!

This Christmas don't let this season slip by without making a statement. You could utter a line that would be unforgettable in the mind of someone you love...

An explanation to a spouse or child... a declaration to your family... an expectation of divine purpose... a

dedication to God... an adoration of God... an affirmation of the love of God to a person who needs to hear it... and **anticipation** of a better day to a person struggling just to make it through another day.

Your statement might just be the right line for the script God is writing in that person's life this Christmas.

You can make a memorable statement this year, one that will bring good tidings of great joy to the people around you, and one that will honor and glorify God.