

There are many great Christmas movies from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But arguably the greatest 21<sup>st</sup> century Christmas movie is from 2003: *Elf*.

*Elf* stars Will Farrell, who arguably gives his greatest performance in this film.

Will Farrell plays Buddy, an orphaned human being who is raised by Santa's elves at the North Pole.

Buddy lives with the elves. He goes to school with the elf children. He learns *The Code of the Elves*:

1. Treat every day like Christmas.
2. There's room for everyone on the Nice List.
3. The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

So Buddy grows up as an elf and is a very enthusiastic proponent of the elves' ethos.

But in many ways, Buddy also has difficulty fitting in, literally. The elves are all very short. Buddy is over 6 feet tall. Chairs, beds, bathrooms are all designed for the diminutive elves. On top of this, Buddy does not possess the natural toy making aptitude the elves have.

So Buddy doesn't really fit in. And he doesn't know his own background. He thinks he is a pretty poor excuse for an elf. He doesn't discover until he is 30 that he is really a human. What's more, Buddy finds out that his biological father is still alive.

And to Buddy's horror, he finds out that his father is on Santa's Naughty List, not the Nice List. But article #2 of *The Code of the Elves* says that there's room for everyone on the Nice List. So Buddy makes an epic journey to New York City to help his father have a change of heart.

In New York, the 6' 3" man dressed in a green elf-suit with the naivete of child encounters much cynicism and ridicule. Buddy's ways seem absurd at first. But Buddy also wins people over because he is warm and loving and sincere to all he meets.

In our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah, we hear idealistic words about the coming of the Messiah. In fact, this vision is almost absurd in its hope:

"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together... The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox."<sup>1</sup>

And, Isaiah adds, "a little child shall lead them."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:6-7

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 11:6

And who is this little child who is coming? He is God's anointed emissary, God's Messiah. He is a new king from the line of King David. In Isaiah's words, words that are illustrated in our first window back in the corner,

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."<sup>3</sup>

This shoot from Jesse's tree, this new and coming king will bring new life.

[10:30 We sang about this king this morning using words that Christians have been singing for 1,200 years:]

[8:00 We will sing about this king at the 10:30 service using words that Christians have been singing for 1,200 years:]

*O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree,  
Free them from Satan's tyranny  
That trust thy mighty power to save,  
And give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*<sup>4</sup>

The coming king will bring us new life. At one level that new life comes at the end, when death is defeated, when the Messiah gives us "victory o'er the grave."

But at another level, it is also new life that we can begin living now. And Buddy the Elf and The Code of the Elves can help us out.

*The Code of the Elves #1: Treat every day like Christmas.*

I don't think that means we need to sing "Jingle Bells" every single day of the year. I also don't think we need to keep the Christmas trees and decorations up all 12 months of the year.

But I believe there is great wisdom in the statement, "Treat every day like Christmas."

The fact that God lived among us as a human being, the fact that God was incarnate in Jesus Christ is one of the most important things, ever. And we have 2 basic choices. We can pay lip service to that idea once a year on December 25. Or we can live in and into that good news every day of the year.

God loves us so much that he came to live among us as one of us. That's something so important that we spend 4 weeks of Advent preparing to celebrate. The we spend 12 days of

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 11:1

<sup>4</sup> Hymnal #56, v4s

Christmas celebrating it. And then for the remainder of the year we stand up Sunday by Sunday and proclaim

*For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.*<sup>5</sup>

Treat every day like Christmas. Treat every day like the coming of Jesus is one of the most important things in the history of the world. Treat every day like the coming of Jesus is one of the most important things in your life as well.

*The Code of the Elves #2: There's room for everyone on the Nice List.*

This code actually ties in well with the great prophet of Advent, St. John the Baptist. We heard his message today. Repent. Make a change. It's not too late. It's never too late.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."<sup>6</sup>

That's what Buddy the Elf is proclaiming as well. Buddy leaves behind the North Pole to bring a change to his biological father. Buddy wants to get his father off the Naughty List and onto the Nice List.

And Buddy transforms his father by loving him unconditionally, which in turn causes his father to begin to love others himself.

This is the reason Buddy made his epic journey, "(Passing) the seven levels of the Candy Cane forest, through the sea of swirly-twirly gum drops, and then... through the Lincoln Tunnel."

This is the reason Jesus came. As Paul reminds us, "(Christ Jesus) was in the form of God, (but) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited (something to be grasped)."<sup>7</sup>

Instead, "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (the form of a slave), (and was) born as a human being."<sup>8</sup>

He did this to bring us into his Father's kingdom, to give us a place at his Father's table where there is always room for everyone if we will accept his invitation.

And if we have accepted that invitation, then we have a job to do.

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<sup>5</sup> BCP p358

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 3:2

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:6

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 2:7

*The Code of the Elves #3*: The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

In the movie, "singing loud" is not about actual volume. It is about sincerity. It is about more than just going through the motions. It is about singing with your whole heart.

We don't need to sing actual songs in order to spread the message and joy and love of Jesus Christ. But we do need to do more than just go through the motions.

Every Sunday at our early service we proclaim these words in old Elizabethan English:

*Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith:  
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.<sup>9</sup>*

Love God. And love your neighbor. "Singing loud for all to hear" is about both. It is about praising God for all God has done for us.

It's also about the way we treat our fellow humans whom God places in our path.

"Singing loud for all to hear" can be done with a kind word, with a warm smile, with an act of compassion or forgiveness. It can be done in any little way that we shine a bit of God's light or share a bit of God's love with the people we encounter.

Buddy the Elf transforms peoples' lives for the better by sharing the joy of Christmas to family and strangers alike.

As we prepare for that great celebration, may we also share God's love and joy with those who we encounter.

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<sup>9</sup> BCP p324