

Simple Christmas
Pastor David Seabaugh
Immanuel, Elmhurst

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:7

Most of us are familiar with the song, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." It was written for the 1943 film, Meet Me in St. Louis, and sung by Judy Garland. It has become a holiday favorite with its touch of melancholy and its nostalgic focus on the beauty of people being together. The song particularly spoke to soldiers who were deployed to fight in World War 2.

Does it speak to us today? I'll admit, it would speak to me a whole lot more if it mentioned Jesus! Regardless, I think there's a simple message in the lyrics that should resonate with all of us this season.

We live in a holiday world of 25-foot blowup snowmen, animatronic elves with creepy eyes, and light displays most safely viewed with eclipse sunglasses. Bigger is better and obscenely big is best. The game of lawn ornament one-upmanship extends back to Halloween, gives an awkward nod to Thanksgiving, and then goes ballistic for Christmas. The lawn ornaments are only the beginning. I hear about the holidays being something that you can win. Victory can be yours with the tastiest food, the most unique gifts, and the ugliest ugly sweater. Game on.

The more our culture appropriates Christmas, the further we drift from the real thing. Maybe that's why the Merry Little Christmas song resonates with me. We've been doing big, complicated Christmas for so long, I find myself yearning for something simple. Friends who are dear to us, gather near to us to hear a true story from 2,000 years ago about how the creator God joined His creation to recreate us in His image. That shining star above the highest bough led wise men to worship the child. This Jesus came so that our hearts could be light, and sacrificed Himself so that our troubles would be out of sight. One day, Jesus will return and we all will be together, those who put their trust in Him, and we will enjoy the beautiful simplicity of a world made right.

If you think about it, the birth of Jesus was rather simple. We imagine a desperate scramble to find a suitable place for Mary to have a baby. A simple stable fit the bill. It wasn't so simple for the late-shift shepherds who got quite a scare from a sky full of angels, but even that was more of a private showing, not the feature film. The next day was remarkably similar to the day before. The animals got their feeding trough back and Mary and Joseph had to figure out life with a new baby...who also happened to be God.

So can we have ourselves a merry little Christmas? Can it be as simple as just celebrating the birth of Jesus? Can we resist the competitive fervor and the endless obligations in favor of heartfelt devotion? It doesn't have to be anything special. Simple will do.

Have yourselves a merry little Christmas everyone!