

## The Christmas Candle

Good morning!

As we approach the Christmas season, we all begin to look forward to our family traditions to celebrate Jesus' arrival.

Old holiday memories flood our minds with the wonders from the past. Baking cookies, wrapping presents, stringing lights, decorating the tree, the wonder of Christmas Eve, and best of all—watching those warm, fuzzy family movies that quicken our childhood memories!

And every once in a while a new movie comes along that ties it all together in one nice package, a Christmas package in this case, and that's the gift we have this year with the new film, *The Christmas Candle*.

Some of you may already be familiar with the book by Max Lucado that *The Christmas Candle* is based upon. If you are, then on November 22nd you're in for a real treat, but don't spoil the ending for those of us who have not read the book! (If you have not read it, I encourage you to do so as there are some golden nuggets for all of us.)

Allow me to give you a brief synopsis of this heartwarming film.

It all takes place in the late 1800's in the small English village of Gladbury where something miraculous happens every 25 years through the local candlemaker when an angel appears to touch a single candle. The person who lights this particular Christmas candle gets their prayer answered, a miracle on Christmas Eve!

Although the townspeople believe this miraculous event is real, which it surely is, their hope in a single candle to answer their most dire prayers causes its own problems for them, and exacerbates it when the new minister arrives with his own special faith challenges.

His name is David Richmond, and although his heart is in the right place to love and serve the people of Gladbury, the idea of a miracle candle, and everyone's hope in it, puts him off. As the two sides collide, the supernatural hunger of the townspeople and the pragmatic young Richmond, the Lord reminds and restores to all the true meaning of Christmas.

Let's take a peek at what will be in theaters on November 22nd:

[The Christmas Candle Trailer](#)

Feels like a Jane Austin story with a splash of the Divine, doesn't it? Dripping with Dickens and plum pudding aromas of a bygone Christmas era where a delicate candle's

flame made a difference in an otherwise dark and lonely night. For some though, this time of year has no supernatural specialty, no guiding light, no real meaning...the darkness remains.

For those in the cold shadows who still do not see Him, as we graciously do, it is a sad irony that should inspire us to make a difference, to be that candle to them to lead them out of their night. In the midst of all our holiday busyness, we can miss the magical point of Bethlehem's light, taking His light of salvation to the lost.

Unfortunately, reality usually tests that fuzzy Christmas feeling for others as we get caught up in all the shopping and travel, and even our faith can be frayed a bit. We forget that things aren't always that great for everyone this time of year. For some Christmas can be hard, bringing smothering regrets that snuff out the brightest flame. We see this clearly in *The Christmas Candle*.

When Reverend Richmond arrives the town is in a fuss, all their hopes wrapped up in one candle, and just like us at Christmastime, focused on themselves. He's abhorred by this fixation on the candle and not on the source of the answered prayer, but we sense something is also amiss in his indignation.

*"I'm not the miracle man you remember,"* he tells us in the midst of the celebration of Advent, a high church holiday rarely practiced in most churches today. *Adventus* means "coming" or "arrival" in Latin, and *The Christmas Candle* story is segmented nicely around our Advent and the Advent Wreath.

The Advent Wreath is used in the Church of England's Christmas services, where on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, each one is marked by lighting a candle in the wreath celebrating Jesus' gift to us. On Christmas Eve the fifth candle in the center is lit signifying His final arrival in Bethlehem.

Let's take a look at each candle's significance, as Reverend Richmond describes it, and see if it might shed some light on our own lives this holiday season, and how we can magnify His light to those for whom it is intended.

### **Candle 1: The Hope**

*"The first candle of Advent is the candle of hope. But hope in what? An answered prayer? A miracle? A Christmas Candle? We light this candle to remind us that our hope does not come from earthly things, but from above. From the God who came to us one starry night in Bethlehem and promises to come again one day."*

The Gladbury townspeople all hope for a miracle, but the pragmatic minister arrives to steer them away from such foolishness, and from their own selfishness. How about you? Are you wrapped up in all of your own needs, worries, and wants this year?

Do you still have a hope that God will come through and shock you with His magnificence this Christmas? Maybe it's a failed relationship...a lost job...a fearful diagnosis...a grief unspoken. Is there an area in your life that you've stopped believing and hoping that His hand may yet heal?

To be sure, all of these can be important needs, and should be on your prayer list, but 100 years from today they will not be important. What's truly important is the lost souls around you who do not share in your ultimate hope this season. They are in darkness, completely unaware that there is a Savior Who was foretold in the Old Testament Who loves them. Look at the hope that Isaiah foretold of His coming:

*"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them (Isaiah 9:2)."*

And again in chapter 60, he says:

*"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

What gets us through all those trials and difficulties each year? It is, of course, our hope in Him, of a better world to come. One without sin and death. One where He protects us and provides all we need. That is our hope...a restored relationship with our Creator forever.

But what of those around us who do not know Him and miss His advent each year?

Friends, how do you think these poor souls will see His light this Christmas? I humbly submit to you that we are His body now; you are the only light-bearer for those in your life who do not understand Bethlehem. His hope this Christmas is that you will share your hope in Him with them. Help them to see His advent that can give them your eternal hope too.

## **Candle 2: His Love**

*"We light the second candle of Advent in the love of God. During Advent, God pierces the darkness of the world with divine light and love. Because He loved us, He sent his son to light the way. Though we wait for Christmas day, we must not wait to love one another as Christ did. Does your neighbor need a miracle this Christmas? Why not be that miracle?"*

As you'll see, Reverend Richmond may be somewhat jaded about the supernatural candle, but he knows that he must still be the spiritual example to them all as their new Shepherd, and sets out to serve them in love. The good Reverend is lacking that crackle

of the supernatural in his soul, but he knows that “*faith without works is dead*” so he proceeds to make a difference citing this verse:

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).”*

Let’s face it. Most of your friends and neighbors who don’t know Christ will never darken the church door or open a Bible. They are content in their blindness. And why shouldn’t they be? They know nothing else. What more can we expect from someone who is spiritually dead? They are unaware of His advent in Bethlehem. This should move your heart to compassion for them. Sincere, sacrificial love, like He demonstrated.

You’ve heard it said that the only Bible some folks will ever read is you. That’s true. Francis of Assisi said, “*I preach the gospel all the time. Sometimes I use words.*” In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul said, “*I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*”

You are the un-entered Church to them now, the only “part” of the gospel they may ever read, His body among them today, a masterful way to multiply His effectiveness a million-fold to a dead world. What you say and do is as much of Jesus as your friends and neighbors will ever know. And Christmas is the one time of the year that it’s okay to talk to them about Jesus...if they will listen. But what if they do not?

Then you can imitate Reverend Richmond and take an interest in them, their hobbies, and their needs. You can help fix their roof, bring them groceries or homemade meals. Remember Proverbs 18:16, “*A man’s gift makes room for him....*” You can create an opportunity to shine your light by some simple thoughtfulness. You can make an impression on them through some small kindness. It just takes a little selflessness and some thought.

So ask yourself...what does my lost brother, my religious aunt, my crabby neighbor, my know-it-all co-worker need done for them this Christmas? As the good Reverend says, “*Why not be that miracle?*”

### **Candle 3: Our Joy**

*“Rejoice! For today we light the third candle of advent. The candle of joy. When Christ was born God used angels to proclaim “good tidings of great joy” to all mankind. Now we are the messengers of this good news. For with every good deed, every act of kindness, Christ is born again and again in our lives. Now, let us all go forth as joyful messengers, doing the work of God.”*

This is the season when your joy about the Savior should be seen the most. You should radiate that light of His salvation to one and all. When you're gone, folks should say of you, "*Wasn't he the happiest person?*" "*She always had that glow about her.*"

I can hear you now. I'm not that way. I'm a serious person. My face doesn't reflect the joy in my heart.

In the language of 1890's Gladbury...Poppycock!

Just do a word search on the word "joy" and see what pops up in your Bible. There are over 35 verses in the Psalms alone. We are expected to be happy, happy, happy!

Honestly, we can all do better if we really think about what our salvation means, how fortunate we are to have been rescued, what amazing grace to be chosen, freed from guilt and damnation!

*He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God (Psalm 40)."*

*"...the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10)."*

*"In Your presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11)."*

I submit to you, brothers and sisters, that your face has a direct "joy muscle" to your redeemed heart, and if your face isn't brilliant with gratitude for His gift of salvation, then you are not spending enough time alone with Him, in His presence, realizing His joy!

Of all the times of the year to be thrilled about your destiny, Christmas is it! It all began in Bethlehem. You've been chosen, forgiven, and appointed as His ambassador to spread the good news! Can't you grin about that? Can't you get excited about being His delight?

Oh, I pray that you would think long and hard about your countenance when out amongst this lost and dying world this Christmas. Your face is the window to your soul and people are watching! Look no further than Luke 4:16 for the meaning of Christmas:

*He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and*

*the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

### Jesus reads Isaiah

You are free, released, your sight restored! Christian...BE JOYFUL!

### **Candle 4: Our Peace**

*"Christ came to bring peace to this world and eternal life in the world to come. The fourth candle of Advent, our last before Christmas Eve, represents the peace of God, which passes all understanding. In the coming days of Christmas, let us be instruments of this peace. Shining light where there is darkness. Hope where there is despair. Sowing joy where there is sadness. And faith where there is doubt."*

According to the New York Times in 2011:

- The average American spent eight and a half hours a day in front of a screen.
- The number of hours American adults spent online doubled between 2005 and 2009.
- The hours in front of a TV screen, often with another screen, is increasing dramatically.
- The average American teenager sends or receives 75 text messages a day.

Our world is a busy, noisy, overwhelming cacophony of interruptions and distractions. We are bombarded with images, information, and news. We are rarely silent or in a silent situation. No wonder the simple world of a sleepy hamlet like Gladbury is so appealing to us. Despite the drama, it is a peaceful time.

We all need peace and quiet, to rest in His peace, and by the end of the film, we see that even the Reverend Richmond himself needs this peace. But the peace that this candle represents is more than that relaxed and slippred "feeling of ahhhh" after a long day.

It is that sort of contentment to be sure, but it is much more than that; it is the peace that comes when two parties who are at enmity with one another are reconciled.

*"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1)."*

This is the Christmas peace that is portrayed so vividly in ***The Christmas Candle*** when the believers begin to affect those around them. Their focus shifts from themselves and their Christmas Candle requests to helping each other, and as a result the skeptics are converted. His peace at last!

## **Candle 5: Christ**

*“On Christmas Eve we light the final candle of Advent – The Christ Candle, for only in Christ do we find the hope, love, joy, and peace we have come to know this season.”*

And now we come to the last candle, the Christmas Eve candle in the center of the wreath. Before us now is a glowing ring of five brilliant candles, lighting the way for all to Bethlehem’s Christmas gift...the promised Messiah.

Listen to the His words in John 8, *“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*

Who needs this light in your life this Christmas? A neighbor? A relative shut in? A person like Gladbury’s Emily Barstow who “doesn’t need any help” and “hates to be indebted to anyone,” content to miss the true meaning of yet one more Christmas?

Prayerfully look around your life. Take stock of your relationships. There are hurting people, stumbling in darkness, completely dead to the *“Light of life”* that Jesus speaks of here.

*The Christmas Candle* helps us to see that even if we are focused on the “right” things in our life, even our 25-year prayers of desperation that are real needs, but that does not include others, and specifically the lost in the darkness “others,” then we’ve missed His point in coming. The fifth candle is a cold flame. It is all about the captives.

So what can we conclude from this wonderful film to take away with us this holiday season? Ultimately, *The Christmas Candle* shows us that Christmas is not about us. It has never been about you. It is about Jesus and His love for the lost all around us, as He said in reading Isaiah in the temple.

It is about a grateful life lived to shine His salvation hope to those in your life who do not “get” Christmas. As they say so often in the movie when the Christmas Candle is given away, *“Light this and pray!”* Who needs you this Christmas, to light up their life with His Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace? Pray that he would show you who needs to be freed.

Everyone around you—the mailman, the clerk, the waitress, the widowed neighbor, the distant relative, or the woman at the copy machine...all need to know He’s arrived. Be the miracle to them. Be The Christmas Candle that glows Christ to a cold and dead world. Make a difference, as Reverend Richmond did for his town. Serve them!

I pray you’ll take this seriously, and celebrate His birth differently this year, by reaching out with some practical ways to love and serve the people who are reading your life this

year. Make a difference in someone's eternity this Advent. That's what *The Christmas Candle* is all about.

Let's pray.

\* <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/opinion/sunday/the-joy-of-quiet.html?pagewanted=all>