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Sunday School Children's Christmas Service
12/24/23 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

A few years ago, Kirk Cameron made a faith film called *Saving Christmas*... and I laugh every time I think about it, because at that time it became the worst rated film ever on two major internet websites, Rotten Tomatoes and IMDb, the Internet Movie Database. Of course, there was an uproar in the American Christian community about this. This is another attack in the war on Christmas – first the Starbucks cups, now this, I mean what is this world coming to?!?

Now I will admit that I never actually saw the movie, so I don't know whether it was as bad as its ranking says. But I do know that ugly scores on Rotten Tomatoes or IMDb don't change anything about what Christmas or Christianity really are, and as sincere and well-meaning as Kirk Cameron is in his Christian faith, he is not our Savior, and he doesn't need to save Christmas. Christmas is and always will be about Jesus Christ, and no amount of negative reviews can change that. See, apart from Jesus Christ, there would be no Christmas; apart from Jesus Christ there would be no joy to the world, no peace on earth, no goodwill toward men; and apart from Jesus Christ there could never be salvation for sinners like us.

And that's what makes this Christmas story the greatest story ever told, because not even Nicholas Sparks can write a love story like this one. This story is all about our God who couldn't bear to be without us – so much so that he sacrificed everything to make us his own. Here's what Matthew says about Jesus' birth: "*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us.'*" We call Jesus Immanuel because he is God made flesh, God who left his heavenly throne for us and for our salvation, and came down to earth to be one of us so that he could know us, so that he could sympathize with us and everything we have to go through here, so that he could walk in our shoes, and ultimately so that he could redeem us from our sins. We owed him everything and he owed us nothing except eternal punishment and condemnation, but instead he gave us everything – all his gifts of goodness and grace – and required of us nothing. Jesus came down to us because that's what he had to do in order to bring us up to

heaven to live with him there forever. Who could imagine that God's love for us was so great that he would sacrifice his own power and glory and even his very self to save us? Our God could. That's what our gracious Savior has done for us, and that's why we know that Christmas is the greatest story ever told.

See the heart of this story is what the angel said to Joseph, "*[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" Jesus came into this world for one purpose, and it's what his name means: salvation. Jesus was God and man in one person so that he could keep all of God's commands perfectly in our place because we haven't and couldn't, and so that by his death on the cross he could take away all our sins and give us eternal life in heaven. Jesus was God and man in one person so that he could be our substitute and so that he could be our Savior.

Yes, Christmas is the greatest story ever told – but I guess really, it's only the first chapter. See, about three and a half months from now, we're going to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. But without Christmas neither of those events ever happens and we're still lost in our sins. The reason we celebrate Christmas is because it points forward to the cross and the empty tomb – it's the first step toward our sins being paid for in full and our eternal life in heaven being guaranteed! Christmas is how we know that our God really is serious about His love for us and how much he wants all of us to be saved. He wasn't willing to let us die in our sins, so he himself came to save us – to conquer sin, death, and the devil for us, and to bring peace, hope, and joy to a world full of guilt and darkness and despair. So my friends, because Jesus Christ came for you, know that your sins are forgiven, life and salvation are yours forever, the doors to heaven are thrown open for you, and your Savior is waiting there for you with open arms.

So forgive me if I don't get too worked up about negative reviews for some fictional Kirk Cameron Christmas movie. I guess it's because we really don't need to save Christmas. It's Christmas that saved us – and I know that there is nothing in this world that can take away what Jesus did for me and for you when he came to be one of us as a baby in Bethlehem. God bless you all this Christmas season as you marvel at our God who loved us so much that he sacrificed his own life in order to save ours for eternal life in heaven with him forever. Amen.