

Pastor Jon's Christmas Eve Sermon in 2025

Merry Christmas!

Now that all the packages are wrapped... the cookies baked... and the guests have hopefully arrived... let us hear the Good News of Jesus' birth.

You know the saying, "Let's Keep Christ in Christmas". Well tonight, my message is, "Let's Keep the Cross in Christmas".

We can't truly think about the manger without the cross... the things Jesus went through on earth to save us. The manger and the cross are where God, our Emmanuel, God with us, enters the world as a human being with all its joys and sorrows to bring us hope. And to a world that is hurting over things like mass shootings, wars, economic pressures, and the hurts and losses we experience in our own families, the cross gives the manger even more power. The cross says Jesus is with us in it all... from the cradle to the grave and beyond.

I always like to use an illustration from a song or movie on Christmas Eve. This year I chose Home Alone. How many Home Alone fans out there? I rewatched the 1st one this year with new eyes. I noticed it is filled with more signs of love, repentance, and reconciliation than I remember. Perhaps I needed to see it more than ever this year.

It had to do with Kevin's relationship with Old Man Marley, Kevin's mysterious neighbor. You remember Buzz, right, Kevin's bullylike, big brother? He made up stories about Old Man Marley as they looked out the window... that he murdered people with a shovel and stored them in a garbage can of salt that he spreads on his sidewalks at night.

You know the story, before the family trip, Kevin gets blamed for everything and wishes his family would disappear. The next day they were gone.

As Kevin has to learn to survive on his own, he goes out to buy a toothbrush. Old Man Marley shows up in the same store and

seemingly slams his fist on the counter. It scares Kevin, and he runs away with the toothbrush in hand. If you look closely, Marley's hand had a bandage on it with blood on the palm and on the top as if something went through his hand. Could he be pointing to Christ's wounds? Kevin then reflects on his way home. "I am a criminal". This made me think of all the ways we fall short. It also reminded me, Oh Holy Night, when we sing "Long lay the world in sin and error pining until he appears and the soul felt its worth."

One thing led to another in the movie, and knowing that the Wet Bandits would be coming to the McAllister house at 9PM, Kevin needs to get ready to protect his home. But first he wanders into a church. And I think this is the part that got me. He was drawn in by a children's choir singing Oh Holy Night. He looks around as if this is a completely new experience for him. He then sits in a pew. He looks up and sees Old Man Marley sit across from him. Marley comes up to a scared Kevin and quietly says, "Merry Christmas." Kevin, confused by this gracious greeting, says, "Huh?" Marley asks if he can sit with Kevin. They have a beautiful cross-filled conversation. Marley points out his granddaughter singing up front. You see, Marley could only watch his granddaughter practice, because he wasn't welcome at the real thing that night. Marley and his son had a falling out years earlier over an argument.

Marley then asked Kevin if he was a good boy this year. Kevin finally says, "No." Marley shares, "Well, this is the place to be if you are feeling bad about yourself." Kevin then confesses, "I've been kind of a pain lately. I've said some things I shouldn't have." Can you relate? To be honest his family said some pretty hurtful things too. Marley and Kevin then discuss that family is complicated thing. "You can hurt them and they can hurt you but deep down you love them." At the end of that scene, Kevin tells Marley, "You should call your son."

Long story short, in the end, Marley teams up with Kevin to nab the wet bandits. When Kevin's mom and family finally return home by

different routes, Kevin and his mom share a beautiful hug as she says, “I’m so sorry.” In the final scene, Kevin walks to the window to look outside and sees Marley’s family coming to his house. He witnesses them hugging each other. Finally, peace at last in the Marley home.

In our Christmas Gospel, Jesus was born into a world in need of healing and reconciliation. It was a world dominated by the Roman Empire and its crippling taxation system and unchecked power. Jesus came into our world and is still present through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus was born, an Angel appeared to some shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. The message to the already terrified shepherds was, “Do not be afraid”. Do not be afraid. We need to hear this too. We are afraid of many things present and future. But the message “For see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for **all** the people; to **you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Jesus’ birth is good news of great joy for all humankind and the earth. God is with us. Love has come as a light in the darkness. We are not alone.

And like the shepherds, who were the most unlikely of preachers, we too are called to spread the good news of Jesus’ birth. We too are to leave church glorifying and praising God for all we have heard and seen. Jesus has come into our cross-filled world, and into the messiness of our lives, to reconcile us to God and our neighbors. We experience this gift of grace in the Word, Holy Communion, and in the face of each other. Go and show others this grace! Merry Christmas!