

## **BRING ON THE CHRISTMAS SHOW RE-RUNS**

In light of the insipid, uninspiring crop of new Christmas shows on tv, I am thankful for the old ones that return every year. Many others enjoy them, too, or "Miracle on 34th Street", "A Christmas Carol," and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" wouldn't reappear every Christmas season. Why do we keep tuning in year after year? It seems that we are psychologically wired do so .

According to Jay Derrick, psychology professor at the University of Houston, re-watching our favorite tv shows helps us feel restored, knowing that we won't be disappointed by an unpredictable ending. Raymond Marr, professor of psychology at York University, asserts that popular re-runs prompt a sense of community that assuages loneliness. And Shira Gabriel, psychology professor at the University of Buffalo, says that turning to the same stories again and again is an innate drive: "There's this strong, very old evolutionary system in us that pulls us towards wanting these comforting narratives." Indeed,

In the Christian worldview, this magnetic draw toward comforting narratives is instilled by our Creator God, the greatest storyteller of all. He has crafted the most comforting and compelling story imaginable, and recorded it through the pages of the Bible, to which people of countless generations have returned again and again.

Not only is this epic story a fascinating and compelling tale, we know it is true, because it has been vetted by experts from many disciplines, and corroborated by history, archeological evidence, and eyewitnesses.

In the Bible we see the original, once-upon-a-time beginning, when God and humankind enjoyed a pure relationship (Genesis 1). But it was tragically severed through human pride and disobedience, leaving a

vast chasm between Holy God and sinful man (Genesis 3). But God's unchanging love never faltered, and He promised a Savior to be the one and only bridge to restoration (Genesis 3:15; John 14:6).

The divine Savior, called the Word of God, is the lead character in the biblical drama from end to end. As the apostle John put it, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:1,4). The whole Old Testament points to Him through types and through dozens of prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus, who made his human debut in Bethlehem, just as prophesied (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-6).

This is the treasured part of the story we love to hear again and again at Christmas. Wrapped in familiarity, and portrayed through quaint greeting card images and charming children's pageants, the stunning reality can get muffled: that Jesus, God of the universe and divine King of kings, deigned to join us as one of us, born a helpless baby in the humblest of circumstances, to save us from our sins (1 Timothy 1:15).

The rest of Jesus' earthly story entails displacement, poverty, homelessness, loss, rejection, betrayal, suffering, and torturous death -- not the usual track for a comforting, perennial favorite. Yet it is our all-time favorite, because we know how the story comes out: with Jesus' glorious resurrection from the dead, and the ultimate, happily-ever-after ending for all who turn to Him in faith (Matthew 28: Revelation 21-22).

Therein lies the comfort and predictability our psyches naturally crave, echoed only faintly in any other story we seek out again and again. So, year after year, we joyfully celebrate the astounding true story of Jesus' long-awaited birth.

We delight in it, as it alone satisfies our innate longing for a hero to make all things right, who desires to enfold everyone into the glorious peace and joy of his loving presence forever, when He comes again (John 14:2-3).

So read the timeless story again (Luke 2:1-20). Ponder its wondrous truth. Retell it to yourself, and share it with others craving a really, really good story.

As the vintage hymn urges, "Tell me the old, old story, of unseen things above, of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love." Merry Christmas!

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux