

## *Christmas in the Movies*

### *“Elf – Joy”*

#### [Philippians 4:4](#)

This Advent, we are watching some of the most popular Christmas movies and finding gospel messages in them. Two weeks ago, we watched some clips from the Polar Express and reflected on belief. Last Sunday, we watched Miracle on 34th Street and pondered on hope. Today, we turn to Elf, a 2003 comedy film that quickly became one of the best Christmas movies of all time.

Buddy, a toddler at an orphanage, is accidentally transported to the North Pole on Christmas Eve. This happens when he crawls into Santa’s toy bag, captivated by a teddy bear in it while Santa is enjoying his cookies. The boy is adopted and raised by Papa Elf. So, Buddy grows up at the North Pole, believing that he is an elf and learning in school the Code of the Elves, which are as follows:

1. Treat every day like Christmas;
2. There’s room for everyone on the Nice List;
3. The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

However, as Buddy grows up, he notices that he is different from all the other elves in the North Pole. With his body size, he always stands out among the elves. And, he cannot keep up with his friends in his daily activities of making toys for children because he is not as skillful as the other elves. So, he struggles.

One day, Buddy discovers his true identity. He was given up for adoption as a baby by his mother, Susan. She later died, but his father, Walter, is in New York City, working for a children’s book publisher at the Empire State Building. But, he is unaware of the existence of his firstborn son. Buddy learns that his father is on the Naughty List because of his callous demeanor. But, Santa suggests Buddy can spread Christmas cheer and help his father change. So, Buddy leaves his adopted home and begins a journey to meet his biological father. He is on a mission to get his father moved from the Naughty List to the Nice List. Buddy arrives in the Big Apple, and he finds the city to be full of fun. Let’s take a look. (*Show clip #1*)

Buddy’s actions remind us of the first item on the Code of the Elves. Do you remember it? “Treat every day like Christmas.” For Buddy, who grew up as an elf, every day is full of joy, like Christmas; Every moment is full of awe and wonder, like Christmas. And, he finds joy in the small and simple things that we, adults, often overlook.

My grandchildren have lots of toys their parents bought for him. Toys are found everywhere throughout their house and in their cars. And, by Christmas, there will be even more toys, since I am sure most of the Christmas gifts their parents got for them are toys.

Yet, often, what they enjoy most are not any of those fancy toys but simple things. A notebook and a pen can make my 7-year old grandson happy for a long time because he loves to draw pictures. And, anything can be a toy for my 15-month old granddaughter, who loves to walk around the house and find things to play with. Lately, she seems to get her toys out of the kitchen drawers and shelves. So, her parents had to put away all the items that could be dangerous to her.

God wants us to experience life as little children do -- with awe and wonder, with appreciation for small and simple things. Jesus made it clear to us by welcoming children and blessing them. And, he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:16-17).

As you might have noticed, I get excited easily about small things. I remember hearing a comment not long after I came to Campbell. The person said, "Why pastor Ouk-Yean is excited all the time? She seems to get excited even when there is nothing to be excited about." Well, here is one of those exciting moments I had lately. As you know, I have moved last week. On the day of my move, I took out my dog for a walk and soon noticed that there was no grass area in my neighborhood except the front yard of my landlord. I felt so sorry for my dog. 'Where is she going to pee and poo?' I thought. Then, the following day, in the bright day light, I saw other grass areas, not far from my home. I just did not see them the night before because it was dark. I jumped with joy and told my dog, "Sonoma, now you can pee and poo freely!"

Going back to Elf, Buddy sees the Empire State Building and gets very excited because it's where his father is. Finally, he is meeting his dad for the first time in his life. Let's take a look. (Show clip #2)

All Buddy wants to do for his dad is just love him and show his love for him. But, his dad does not want to receive his love. His dad refuses to believe him. But, Buddy still loves his father. His love for his dad is unconditional.

Isn't this how God loves us? Even when we refuse to receive God's love, God loves us. Even when we are not aware of God's love, it is still there for us. In his prayer, Jesus makes this statement about the depth of God's love for us:

"Righteous Father, even the world didn't know you, but I've known you, and these believers know that you sent me. I've made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them."

You do not have to have your life in order to receive God's love. You do not have to love God first to be loved by God. God loves you because you are God's child. Your parents and your family can desert you, but God will never do so. And, God's love will find you no matter where you are. Even when you believe there is no hope, living in the valley of darkness and destruction, God's love never gives up on you.

Soon, Walter finds out through a DNA test that Buddy is actually his son and takes him into his home. Walter's wife welcomes Buddy without reservation, but it takes a while for his younger son to warm up to his older half-brother. And, Walter is annoyed by Buddy's child-like behavior. But, Buddy continues to find ways to show his love for his new family and spread Christmas cheer to everyone around him. He does so at his father's workplace as well on the day his father takes him to work. Walter asks Buddy to sit quietly in his office. But, Buddy easily gets bored and keeps interrupting his dad. Annoyed, Walter sends Buddy down to the mailroom, so he can focus on his work. Can you guess what Buddy did in the mailroom? Let's take a look. (Show clip #3)

Truly, with Buddy, there is always joy -- smiles and laughter, singing and dancing! He spreads Christmas cheer everywhere he goes, even in a dark basement mailroom with no windows.

Walter's company is in trouble because their last book did not sell well. Walter's boss asks him to have a new book ready by Christmas Eve. In desperation, Walter arranges a meeting with a best-selling children's book author. Buddy interrupts the meeting and mistakes the author who has dwarfism for an elf. Insulted, the author walks out angry. Walter snaps at Buddy for ruining such an important deal. Heartbroken, Buddy leaves his dad's home, leaving behind a note to his family.

While navigating through the streets of New York City, Santa's sleigh crashes in Central Park and attracts a large crowd. Santa's sleigh has lost its engine and cannot fly because there is not enough Christmas spirit. Buddy recovers the lost engine and reattaches it to the sleigh. But, to fully recharge the engine, and be able to fly, the sleigh still needs more Christmas spirit. How do you raise Christmas spirit? According to the Code of the Elves, "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear." Let's take a look and see what happens next. (Show clip 4)

Fully recharged by the singing of the crowd, Santa's sleigh can fly again. Singing loud did the trick! In the scripture we read together earlier, the apostle Paul urges the first Christian believers in Philippi to rejoice. How do you rejoice? For me, to rejoice is to sing. Yes, we rejoice and sing. Buddy sang loud whenever there was music or words to sing.

Our ancestors of faith sang songs of happiness and thanksgiving. But, they sang also when their lives were in deep trouble, and their hearts were filled with anguish. They were able to do so because they were rejoicing in the Lord. They could have joy in the small and simple things because they knew, no matter what was happening, God loved them.

This is also the source of our joy. No matter where we are, no matter what we have done or left undone, God loves us. We know this because of the gift of Jesus Christ, who comes to us on Christmas as the light of the world, who reminds everyone that there is room for all on the Nice list.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, may we live by the Code of Jesus Christ. May we treat each day as an opportunity for Christ to be born in our hearts and spread the joy of his coming to the world. May we rejoice in the Lord always, with singing and dancing, let us rejoice!