

“A Christmas Coat for Mac”

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^{*} took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’²²All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel’,

which means, ‘God is with us.’ ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;^{*} and he named him Jesus.

Macarthur McDougal, henceforth to be known as “Mac” loved Christmas.

He loved everything about Christmas. He love the carols and the songs that were knew and that were old from ‘chestnuts roasting on an open fire’ to ‘silent night’ to ‘jolly old saint nicholas’ to “joy to the world.’ And he loved everyone who sang them from the guy ringing the Salvation Army Bell to the choir in the choir loft to the little children in the pageants and the carolers wandering the streets to the sounds coming from the radio or in the stores and even in the elevator. He loved it all. He loved Christmas cookies and candies and icebox fruit cake with the red and green fruity things and cinnamon buns at church and Christmas brunch with crisp bacon and pumkin bread, and Christmas dinner and oyster stew and the glazed ham and the Christmas goose. He loved the smells of Christmas A fresh evergreen tree right before you put it in the tree stand, The smell and first sip of rich, creamy eggnog. Chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven for Santa. A cozy fire crackling in the fireplace. Chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Dusty ornaments pulled down from the attic. Ginger bread baking and deep rich hot chocolate and popcorn popping to make a garland and scotch tape and wrapping paper and aunt Kate’s ‘evening in paris’ perfume which she wears every year because he gave her a quart of the stuff when he was ten. He loved the stories of Christmas like the year Uncle John surprised everyone coming home from overseas when he was in the army and the year of the great ice storm that brought Christmas to a standstill and the stories of great Christmas presents and some that weren’t so great like

the bike he wished for, for two years, and finally got when he was 12. There were the stories of Christmas pageants with kids in bathrobes with towels on their heads and broom sticks for staffs and 12 year old Mary's who were quite mature and rolled their eyes when 13 year old Josephs giggled every time the narrator read that the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. He loved the tiny angels and the we three kings the year two of them were girls and ad libbed lines like the year the Inn Keeper instead of sharing the sad news of 'no room in the inn' was so moved by the pitifully pregnant Mary that he said she could have his sisters room upstairs. Or the wise man who thought myrh was a dumb gift so he brought the baby Jesus something he could really use – a football. He loved it all. Especially when they softly sang 'away in a manger, no crib for a bed.' How utterly sad he thought. And how astoundingly happy at the same time. He loved hearing about how Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Which is why for heaven's sake all of this stuff happens in the first place!

Mac loved the way Christmas looked. With the tinsel and the garland and the tinkling silver bells. He loved the street lights and the angels, bells, candy

canes and sail boats the town put up on each light pole and the shiny garland they strung across every street corner. He loved the sight of Christmas lights from the houses that would make the Griswalds blush, which was, of course his second favorite Christmas movie, the first being each and every time he watched "A Christmas Story" with Ralphie's unquenchable desire for "a Red Ryder **Carbine** Action 200-shot Range Model **air rifle** with a compass in the stock and "this thing which tells time" and the sound of his Mom saying, "Ralphie, you'll put your eye out" and then it happens, followed closely by "It's A Wonderful Life" and all 18 versions of "A Christmas Carol." He loved houses ablaze with color and those with simple white lights and he loved manger scenes and blow up Santa's and sleighs and he loved strings of lights and stars high above. He loved the church filled with poinsettias and candles all aglow and a giant Christmas tree with angels, and stars and crosses and those RX's he didn't really understand but knew if they were on the tree they must be important. He loved Christmas even when the lights went out except for the tree and the candles in the windows and the tiny lights on the heavenly beautiful nativity scene and the candle light passing from the candle of Christ to the pastor to one person and another, one row and another until all were held aloft and you just knew that somehow, once again, 'All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him

Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' If you didn't feel God with us with a Christmas eve candle in your hand...

He loved how people dressed at Christmas time. In ugly Christmas sweaters and gold lame gowns and tuxedos with green cummerbunds and those little twinkling lights and Santa and elf costumes and bright red and green and purple and gold. He loved people bundling up for the parade and pictures from down south with people wearing santa t-shirts. He loved 'come as you are Christmas morning services with kids in pajamas and old Mr. Jones NOT wearing the same tie he wore every Sunday for thirty years. He loved the pastor's Christmas stole and and... Mac loved everything about Christmas.

Mac was born, raised, educated, married and had children in a small town. Since High School he had worked in Willet's Dept. Store right off the square in the center of town. Mr. Willet was a good man and had been a good boss. But along about August one year he told Mac that he could no longer compete with the big store on the outskirts of town. (Not wal-mart, that other one.) This would be their last Christmas. "So," he said, "let's make it a good one. We'll pull out all the stops and really dress the place up. We'll order extra really merry Christmas wear and run a big sale in December. In the meantime, Mac, we'll start looking for you a new job." On that front Mac wasn't particularly worried, he had prospects. By mid-November, just before thanksgiving which was another holiday Mac loved everything about, he got a new job that would start just after Christmas. The day

after Thanksgiving the store was closed all day.(This story is obviously before Black Friday.) Mac, Mr. Willet and the staff put up extra decorations, made extra big plans and began to unpack the extra Christmas merchandise. It would be a Christmas to remember. As Mac was opening the boxes with men's clothes he pulled out a coat. A sports coat. But not just any sports coat. The mere sight of it took his breath away. Tentatively he pulled it from the garment bag. It was the only one like it. All the rest were solid red, or green, with one or two of gold. But this, this was like nothing he'd seen before. It was like – it was like Christmas. It screamed happy holidays, and good news and don't waste a minute Christmas is here.

He held his breath and checked the size. Oh my goodness. Not another Christmas miracle. It was his size. He gulped. Only one obstacle left. He looked at the number stitched on the sleeve and ran his finger over the inventory list. He gasped. It said, \$569.00. He was devastated. He could never afford it. He called Mr. Willet over who said, 'that's a magnificent coat Mac.' Mac said weakly, "it says the retail price is \$569.00."

"Well we can't have that can we?" said Mr. Willett. "We'll mark it down 10% and put it in the front window." "Yes sir," said Mac, knowing that would make the price a still unreachable \$512.10. His whole wardrobe didn't cost that much. Sighing he vowed to at least enjoy how great it would look in the window and every day in December from the 1st to the 24th he looked at it longingly.

When he arrived for the half day at work on Christmas Eve he saw immediately that the coat was gone. He went directly to the night clerk and asked if it had been bought. She smiled and said, "I wouldn't be surprised if you don't see it on Mr. Willet tonight at church. I do believe he got it for himself. He loves Christmas too you know." Which in a way made Mac a little bit happy.

At noon they closed the store and Mr. Willet invited everyone back to the back where he thanked them for the best Christmas season ever. He said, 'it was fun to have so many new clothes for the season, I'll bet at church tonight half the people will be wearing new Christmas outfits.' Mac sighed as Mr. Willet said, "I know I will."

He then handed out gifts of all shapes and sizes. Mac got a chuckle out of the fact that the wrapping paper was very similar to the coat. Mr. Willet shook Mac's hand and thanked him and handed him a package wrapped in the same paper. He said, "I thought you might like one of those bright green coats to wear tonight I've got something special to wear too.' Mac thanked him and took the package home and placed it under his tree. He'd wear something else tonight.

At 10:30 p.m. the family was all ready to go to church. As always they read the story from Matthew, then Luke. Mac listened as his daughter read about Joseph and he thought how disappointed he must have been before the angel spoke to him. And then what a gift God gave to the whole world. He laughed to himself and wondered if Joseph loved Christmas as much as him.

(Say on the move) As they were walking out the door Mac caught a glance of himself in the mirror with his navy suit and bright red Christmas tie and thought, 'why not?' I love Christmas. So over to the tree he went and picked up the package and tore it open. He opened to box and inside found a card. "It read, "they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' Dear Mac, for the man who loves Christmas more than anyone I've ever know. – Merry Christmas – Mr. Willet.

Don't you just love Christmas?!