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**Title:** The Ghost of Christmas Present

**Series:** A Christmas Carol

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**Text:** [John 1:1-5](#)

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“Marley was dead; to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.”

Those are the words that begin Charles Dickens classic *A Christmas Carol*, the story of the transformation of the old miser Ebenezer Scrooge. This is the focus of our Advent and Christmas sermon series, looking at this story to see what it is saying to us today, to help us to prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Ebenezer Scrooge is first visited by his old business partner, Jacob Marley, who tells him that he needs to change his ways, and on that Christmas Eve, he will be visited by three spirits. Last week, we kicked off the series with the Ghost of Christmas Past, and this week we encounter the Ghost of Christmas Present.

The Ghost of Christmas Present invites Scrooge and invites us to consider two things: time and perspective.

This season of Advent is about marking time, marking time until the birth of a savior. Part of the way we mark time is to light candles each week—Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love—counting the time until we can light, on Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle. But it feels like we need a savior now, not in a few weeks. Today, we lit a candle of peace, but peace feels so elusive—war and destruction in Gaza and Israel and Ukraine, the continued gun violence epidemic in the United States, the sting of racism in our communities. It feels like a fool’s errand to light a candle of peace; why are we waiting on a redemption and salvation, because we need it now?

Early Christians know how we feel. They were waiting on redemption and salvation to come, not in the form of a baby, but in the return of Christ.

The book of 2 Peter is perhaps the newest writing of the Bible, thought to be composed in the year 130. They are waiting for the resurrected Christ's return, for the appearance of salvation. It's been about 100 years, so you can imagine they are anxiously waiting, like we are, and they hear a word about time and perspective:

Do not let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. The Lord isn't slow to keep his promise, as some of you think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. (2 Peter 3:8-9 CEB)

In a season of waiting, this is good news. The Lord doesn't want any to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. If you have ever taken a trip with kids, one of their favorite questions to ask from the back of the car is "Are we there yet?" That is what this group of Christians are asking, patience being in short supply. But there is a word here for them and for us: In other words, even when we can't sense it or know it, God is at work.

Ebenezer Scrooge is beginning to discover this truth as he prepares for the second spirit, The Ghost of Christmas Present, to visit him. We can't know what he was expecting, but it probably was not what he got. The Ghost of Christmas Past had been described as soft and gentle. The Ghost of Christmas Present is anything but soft and gentle.



"At the appointed time, no Spirit appears. After a while, Scrooge is beckoned into a different room. Dickens describes the Ghost of Christmas Present as a jolly giant who bores a glorious torch, light upon light in a shape like plenty's horn."

The spirit says, "You have never seen the like of me before." The Spirit takes Scrooge on a journey above the streets of his neighborhood in London. He offers him a new and different perspective, one he has never had before. He gives him a literal 10,000-foot view of the world. Scrooge sees everyone going about their day, readying themselves for Christmas. He sees the steeples calling people to Christmas services at church. The Spirit sprinkles incense upon people's food as a means of blessing, giving some more than others, giving the poor more, immediately giving Scrooge a new view of how God works in the world.

God's justice is a means of lifting the lowly. Scrooge sees other people as if seeing them for the first time. Scrooge sees his town as if seeing it for the first time. Scrooge sees the world as if seeing it for the first time.

As Scrooge says, "Not many get a heavenly perspective on the world." We need a new perspective on the world. Part of what we are challenged to do as we wait on the birth of Jesus is gain a new perspective, to look at things differently.

Scrooge sees his employee Bob Cratchitt and his family in a different way, as if seeing them for the first time. Scrooge has paid Cratchitt meager wages for some time. Cratchitt had to beg for Christmas Day off. Cratchitt and his son Tiny Tim have arrived home from church, with Tim confined to the use of a crutch to get around. The Cratchitt's Christmas dinner is an exercise in new perspective. Looking at the table, it's hard to imagine how the food will feed all the people around the table. The Christmas goose is so small, it barely qualifies as a goose. The Cratchitts know the sting of poverty, the sting of unjust wages.

It's not how we imagine Christmas dinner, but of course, the birth of Jesus as we know it is not exactly how we would imagine one who would be the savior of the world, the long-awaited Messiah, either. This time of year, we even clean up our nativity scenes to make them look better in our homes and places of worship.

Perspective: God will stop at nothing to be with us. God will stop at nothing to change our perspective from scarcity to abundance.

Scrooge, for the first time, sees the Cratchitt family differently. Perhaps, he actually sees them for the first time. He asks the Ghost of Christmas Present about the fate of Tiny Tim, and the spirit replies, "I see a vacant seat...in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

Scrooge recognizes that he has an opportunity. The way he lives in the present can alter the future. The way he partners with God now can bring about God's future. How should we live now so that the future is better? I hear the words from 2 Peter, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to change their hearts and lives. I hear the words from the Gospel of John:

What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not extinguish the light." (John 1:3b-5 CEB)

New perspective is powerful.

As the Ghost of Christmas Present is getting ready to drop Ebenezer off, one last piece of Gospel comes to Scrooge. From the Ghost of Christmas Present comes two children in disheveled clothes.

"Spirit, are they yours?" asks Scrooge.

The spirit replies, "They are humankind. The boy is Ignorance. The girl is Want."

Scrooge asks if they have no refuge or resource, ignoring the fact that earlier in the day, Scrooge has turned away those collecting on their behalf, exclaiming that those who do not have should be sent to prison or to workhouses. At this moment, Scrooge comes face to face with his sinful ways as the spirit turns his words upon him. He can't understand how people are allowed to be in this condition, but the spirit makes it clear to him.

Are there no prisons?

Are there no workhouses?

Words that work as a mirror, a mirror Scrooge needs. A mirror we need today.

A couple of years ago, a group of people in Dallas put up a billboard on a busy highway saying, "I miss you saying Merry Christmas." Signed Jesus."

I don't think that is what Jesus is concerned about or missing. I think Jesus' concern is how we are proclaiming the good news to all people. How are we caring for the least of these and working to heal the brokenness in the world?

This is our time to get a heavenly perspective of the world, just as God comes down to earth. The birth of Jesus means that God enters into the world fully. To be with us. The light that is the life for all people.

Let us pray:

God of the present, enable us to see how you are already at work in the here and now. As we consider how you are working in the world today, help us to be concerned with the things that Jesus is concerned about. Help us to have your perspective on the world. May we be moved by and mindful of your will of what you call us to do and be. Amen.