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Title: The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Series: A Christmas Carol

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Text: [Luke 1:26-38](#)

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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 that on Christmas Eve, Scrooge will be visited by three spirits.

With this being Christmas Eve, we have arrived at the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come—a silent spirit and the one that scares Ebenezer Scrooge the most. He shows Ebenezer what will happen to him if he doesn’t understand the gift that Christmas is. He shows Scrooge what could happen to him if he does not find the redemption and salvation that he so desperately needs.

It’s a bit of a dark night, but the night of Jesus’ birth was also a bit of a dark night. As Luke tells us, a young unwed teenage mother and Joseph, an uncertain father, are traveling because of a

census ordered by King Herod. They come to Bethlehem; it is crowded because of those traveling to the census, and they end up in a stable behind the inn.

The world was difficult for so many. They had been waiting on a messiah, a savior that would liberate them. They thought they were getting a king. Instead, they got a baby, a baby that would change everything. It seems quite unlikely that this would be the one who would change and redeem the future. Before the birth of Jesus, Luke tells us that an angel named Gabriel comes to Mary to let her know that she will be the God-bearer, the one to bring God into the world.

It changes the course of Mary's future. It also seems quite impossible. Here is how the angel responds because Mary asks a very legitimate question: "How is this possible?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God."

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:35-38 CEB)

Nothing is impossible for God. It echoes the wonder of Sarah in the book of Genesis, who proclaimed, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" It echoes the words of Jesus, grown up, who proclaimed, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Do you sense a theme here? These statements about what is possible for God are not speaking about what God has done or even what God is doing, but what God will do.

The birth of Jesus is not about something that happened long ago but about what is happening in this moment and what God is preparing to do.

The birth of Jesus is a promise.

As Scrooge gets a glimpse of the future, it is not good. He comes face to face with his own mortality, and he discovers that his life, in the grand scheme of things, meant nothing. Scrooge asks the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come an important question: "Are these the shadows of the things that Will be or are they the shadows of the things that May be?"

Scrooge wants to know, is what I am seeing, is this set in stone, or can it be changed? Can the future be different? Can I write a different story about my life? We want to know that, don't we? Is the future set in stone or can it be changed?

Does this night, does the birth of a savior really mean anything? Even when a hopeful future feels impossible?

Brene Brown tells a story in her book *Atlas of the Heart* about a man she interviewed. He was getting on in years. He said to her "I spent most of my adult life expecting the worst, just expecting that the worst would come; it was a way for me to be ready for it when it did."

And then, he said, my wife was killed in a car accident, and I was not prepared for the grief, for the sorrow, and for the tears that kept coming and coming. He paused and then said, I cannot begin to tell you the regret that I am filled with as I look back at our life together, the many wonderful memories, the wonderful times we had together as husband and wife, that I know as I look back, I was waiting for the worst to come. I was never fully there. I never experienced joy as I should have.

So I have made a promise to my wife in her death, that I will be present in the moment. I will experience the joy of now. I will be hopeful for the future.

The birth of Jesus means that salvation has come.

We don't have to keep looking over our shoulder, waiting for the worst, because it is God who holds our future.

As we sing Joy to the World, these words give us a glimpse of the future:

“No more let sin and sorrow grow.

He rules the world with truth and grace.”

It is good news for Ebenezer Scrooge that the vision of the future he sees, it doesn't have to be what is. It is what may be. But it's not too late for him.

The next time we see Scrooge, the scene has moved from darkness to light. It's Christmas morning, and something has changed. “It's Christmas Day and I haven't missed it.”

Ebenezer Scrooge is offered a new day, which seems odd. Until we remember that nothing is impossible with God. That nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. That what seems impossible for mortals is always possible for God.

The shepherds are the first to hear what we hear tonight:

¹⁰The angel said, “Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people.

Do you hear that? I bring good news to you

Ebenezer Scrooge reminds us of the heart of the Gospel—that the Gospel, at its heart, is a rescue story. That we don't really find God but that God finds us; God comes to us. What the angel says, I bring good news to you. You have been found, we have been found.

No matter where you find yourself tonight, your story begins anew. Christ is born and nothing will be the same again.

What is said about Ebenezer Scrooge, what he becomes known for in this new future, is that he keeps Christmas well. He finds hope in this new life. He is generous with others and with his community. He discovers joy in a newfound appreciation and relationship Bob Cratchitt and Tiny

Tim. He reconciles with his nephew Fred, his family, finally accepting their grace-filled invitation to dinner.

For Ebenezer Scrooge, keeping Christmas well is imagining a new future, living in a different way. His redemption is evident in his living. As people of faith, we are called by God to keep Christmas well.

A savior is born.

Our redemption is here.

Tonight, everything changes.

And God is inviting you to a future beyond what we can imagine.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.