

## **St Peter's Christmas Day Sermon**

**Fr Lord – St Peter's – 25/12/2023**

As the Junior School Chaplain at Brighton Grammar, out of the many Christmas tales that I have read to the boys, there is one particular one that is up there amongst my favourites. I'm sure that most of you have also read the story of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." If you haven't read the book, perhaps you have seen the movie. If so, you will remember how everyone in Who-ville loved Christmas. Everyone, that is, except the Grinch. The Grinch hated Christmas and made up a plan to spoil the joy of Christmas for all in Who-ville. His plan was to dress up as Santa Claus and go into Who-ville and steal all of their Christmas presents, all of their Christmas trees, and even the food for their Christmas dinner.

What a terrible thing to do! But I wonder, do you know why the Grinch hated Christmas so much? Well, according to the story, it was because his heart was too small! He was so selfish that he hated to see anyone else who was happy and enjoying themselves. But, as you know, the Grinch's plan did not work. Why? Well, because the people in Who-ville knew that the real joy of Christmas does not come from the presents, decorations and food...but rather it comes from a heart filled with love.

The story of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" is not a true story, but this morning I want to tell you a true story of another "Grinch" who tried to steal Christmas. In fact, he tried to steal the very first Christmas. This "Grinch" was a king by the name of Herod.

After Jesus was born, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem and asked where they could find the child who had been born to be the

King of the Jews. “We have seen his star in the sky and want to worship him”, they said. When Herod heard about this, he told the men that when they found the child, they should report back and tell him where the child was so that he might worship him too. The truth was, Herod wanted to get rid of him. Why? Perhaps his heart was too small too. Herod was so selfish that he was afraid that Jesus would become more popular than he was and, perhaps, even take over his kingdom, even though Jesus wasn’t a king concerned with money, armies and power. But rather a spiritual saviour.

Well, Herod’s plan to get rid of Jesus didn’t work either. After the wise men found Jesus and gave him gifts, an angel told them about Herod’s plan and they went back home without telling Herod where they had found baby Jesus. An angel also appeared to Joseph and warned him of Herod’s plan and directed him to take Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt where they would be safe.

And so, we see that since the very first Christmas, Grinches have been trying to steal the joy of Christmas. Perhaps there may be some “Grinches” trying to steal your Christmas joy. It will never work...unless your heart is too small. We ourselves can be like Grinches sometimes. It’s easy to become a little selfish, a little greedy or even a little thoughtless towards the needs of others. But Christmas offers us a wonderful opportunity to see and observe things with a fresh set of eyes.

Allow me to quote the Grinch at the end of the story:

*Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before!*

*“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “doesn’t come from a store.*

*“Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!”*

Christmas, therefore, is rather about family and friends. It's observing a special time of year where actions speak louder than words. It's an invitation to think about those less fortunate than ourselves: the lonely, lost, sad, frightened, hungry, oppressed, marginalised or forgotten.

It's a time, where, by following the example of Jesus, we display a tenderness for the past, compassion for the present and hope for the future. A time of goodwill to all humankind.

Unfortunately, for many in the world today, that's not possible. The hope and joy that we are 'supposed' to feel at this time of year seems harder to grasp.

I have been reminded, in this often dark year, that it is in the darkest night that you see the stars shine most brightly. In the depths of the dark nights, the shepherds and the Magi followed the brightest star. And it was this star that guided them to a new beginning and a new hope.

It may feel superficial in our current world, to look to the brightest star, the true shining light of Christmas – Jesus the new born, the infant, the child. But I believe it is *because* of the state of the world that we must look to Jesus. It is in the coming of Jesus we find a fresh beginning, a new life, and a renewed hope. Jesus, the brightest star in the darkest night helps us to fix our eyes on the future with an expectant hopefulness that comes with the morning light.

So, as we leave here this morning, make sure that your heart is big enough to share the love and joy of Christmas with everyone you encounter, not just for Christmas but for all year long. And to embrace the true joy and meaning of Christmas: that of Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.