

**Beasts, Grinches, Herods, and...
Transforming Love
Matthew 1:18-2:3**

**Sunday, December 23, 2018
The First Baptist Church of Anderson, SC
Dr. James R. Thomason, Pastor**

**Matthew 1:18-2:3
(Read by Four Youth)**

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

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An Introduction to *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

For about as long as I can remember, I've enjoyed reading the little Dr. Seuss book called "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" to children, and sometimes to adults too!

It's a wonderful story that reminds us of the power of love to change lives and make us better people. Now, that's also central to the Christmas story. In fact, it's at the heart of the entire Gospel.

The story of Jesus and His love is such a powerful message... because it's true. It's God's Truth; and if we embrace it, it leads to a transformation in us--one that we all need!

Back in October, Pam and I got to see some of our children performing in the musical, *Beauty and the Beast*. Many of you saw it too, along with productions of *Peter Pan*, and *Willi Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and others.

It occurs to me that the story of the Beast is much the same as the Grinch's: again, it's about the power that love possesses to make us into something new.

Sadly, however, love can also be resisted. For a while, the Beast refused to be loved. And the Grinch did too.

Now, think about the Christmas story we just heard. There we find old Herod—more beastly than the Beast, and grinchier than the Grinch! We'll get back to Herod--but first, I want to share with you once again:

A reading: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss



(After the reading, join hands and sing *O Come, All Ye Faithful*)

O come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, Born the King of Angels; O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

A Reflection:

Beasts, Grinches, Herods, and... Transforming Love Matthew 1:18-2:3

Don't you like the story of the Grinch? I do--especially the way it ends! Now, I know there're always some who feel it's inappropriate to read a silly little children's book when it's time for "the sermon." Well, bah-humbug to you, too!

Actually, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is, as Dr. Seuss would say, *scary—very!* *Stealing Christmas* is no joke... because it's attempted so often.

Just think for a moment about the many forces at work in our world that would literally steal Christmas from us if we let them. Sadly, this happens; and every year, it seems to happen more.

Oh, people still go through the motions of the season; but so often it's robbed of its true significance. Yet... Christmas is still with us; and since God's love is what's behind Christmas, no Grinch will ever be able to steal it from us.

Sadly, though, we can let it be taken away. We can choose to give it up. Christmas can't be stolen, but we can still lose it.

Imagine for a moment that some Grinch invaded *our* homes on Christmas eve and took all "the ribbons, the wrappings, the trimmings, the trappings." Would Christmas come *anyway*?

How many of us would join hands with the faithful, "the tall and the small, and sing... without any presents at all!"

Some would! Those who haven't already been *robbed of Christmas* would. Maybe, should this happen, more of us would actually *experience* Christmas.

Now, don't misunderstand. I'm glad the Grinch returned the presents, and even brought back the roast beast. These things can *add* to our joy and celebration.

We just have to make sure we can still *find Christmas* beneath all the wrapping paper, and that our hearts are filled with something *more* than just... heartburn.

It can happen. We can experience all the joy and wonder of this holy season--if *this* is what we desire. The choice is ours. Again, we *can* choose to give up Christmas--it just can't be... *stolen!*

Now, I don't base this conviction on Dr. Seuss's little story of The Grinch. As wonderful as it is, it's not a *guide* for our faith.

For that, we turn to the Bible; and when we do, lo and behold, we find *another* story about a Grinch—we might call him the *original* Grinch--the first and most *notorious* of all the Grinchy-type characters who've ever tried to steal Christmas.

He didn't go by the name "Grinch," of course. His name was Herod--Herod the *Great*--but not for the right reasons!

He was called "Great" because he was so terribly and infamously *evil*. He was greatly *feared*--and not just by his enemies—he was even feared by his own family.

When Herod found out he'd been *tricked* by the wise men—instead of telling him where the newborn King was, they took a different route home--remember?

When Herod *learned* of this, he went into "a furious rage." As the old Jim Croce song says, he was "madder (or is it "meaner?") than a junkyard dog." Herod was both!

So, Herod devised a Grinchy *plan*--a sinister plot--to steal Christmas before any word of it got out.

This is what he did. He ordered the *death* of all the male children two years of age and under living around Bethlehem. That was little Cindy Lou Who's age—right?--"she was not more than two."

Who could *do* such a thing? *Herod* could! His soldiers carried out his orders. They knew better than to defy him.

And when they returned from that awful task, Herod felt certain that yet another threat to his power had been *eliminated*. No doubt he and his gang of bandits had *stolen Christmas itself* by

snuffing out the life of the Christmas child. That's what he thought.

But Herod was wrong! *He* couldn't steal Christmas any more than *the Grinch* could. You see, Christmas is *God's doing*. And God's love is more powerful than *anything* that tries to get in its way!

That's Gospel too! There's nothing—*NOTHING*--that can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

If this weren't true, Christmas would have been *forgotten* a long time ago. In fact, if Herod had been able to have his way, we would have never known that Christmas *happened*.

But there are some things in this world that the Herods can't destroy and the Grinches can't steal... because *God says so!*

God sent his One and Only Son into this world on a *mission of love*, and no Herod could stop it. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, including *every* Beast and Grinch and all the run-of-the-mill sinners like us. He came to save us all.

Way back then and still today, Jesus changes the lives of those who *respond* to His love and *receive* Him by faith. Now, with apologies to Dr. Seuss, *this* is how it happens:

Jesus loves and accepts when no one else *would*,
And forgives our sins as only He *could*.
Maybe *our* hearts "grew three sizes" too.
Whatever our *past*, Jesus *made* us brand new!

Could it be that you're also a transformed *Grinch*,
Though some of his traits, you continue to *clinch*.
Or perhaps you have never *answered* His call,
Your life is still troubled by the *worst* Grinch of all.

For the power of *sin and death*, you recall,
Has plagued humankind since Adam's *fall*.
So God sent *His Son* to a barnyard stall,
To love and to give, To *die* and still *live*...

As Lord of Lords... and Savior of all!

Merry Christmas! God bless you!
Amen.