

We've been using the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*, to illustrate the real Miracle of Christmas, the birth of Jesus. The basic plot of the movie is that Kris Kringle really believes that he is Santa. He's not just a department store Santa, with a pillow and fake beard, but the real thing and he represents a Christmas dream come true.

Some people are sceptical but there is something in the story that draws us in. We are invited to reconsider some things we thought we had settled as children. As the story unfolds it opens up some really great questions: Could he really be? What if he is? And if he is who he says he is, how sad not to be recognized, how tragic to be thought a fraud.

These questions seem applicable to more than just Kris Kringle. Those are the same kinds of questions asked about this miracle of Christmas. Who is this baby lying in the manger? Could he really be who everyone says he is? What if He is?

John's Gospel describes for us in beautiful and poetic imagery this miracle of the manger.

Astonishing Claims:

Consider for a moment this miracle of the manger and the astonishing claims made regarding this child. Jesus is born into the humblest of circumstances. His mother is an ordinary, young girl named Mary. His birthplace is a stable, among the animals in a small, obscure little town called Bethlehem. Yet, Jesus came making astonishing claims that centred on His identity. He claimed to be sent from God, the Son of God, and even One with God. The angel announced to shepherds that this baby was Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

As an adult, Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Heaven; Living Water that alone can satisfy our deepest hungers. Jesus claimed the authority to forgive our sins and to offer freely His grace and mercy. Jesus claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Resurrection, the only hope of escaping God's judgment, the only path to eternal life. Jesus claimed all authority in heaven and earth, and He promised to return to judge the world in righteousness. But he also did things that were, in themselves, things that point to his being God: turned water to wine; fed over 5000 people from 5 small loaves and two fish; walked on water; healed all kinds of illness; made the blind see and the lame walk; and, he raised the dead.

What do you make of such radical claims? There are some who would ignore them altogether. There are those who, while being very respectful of Jesus, don't take His astonishing claims seriously. The religion of Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet and teacher. The Hindu religion teaches that Jesus is one way of

many to find God. Many people want to admire Jesus from a distance, but when it comes right down to it, He's just a nice man with a beard.

C.S. Lewis explained that Jesus did not leave us the option of just respecting Him as a good, noble teacher. His own claims leave no room for that position, even though it is very popular. We really only have three options concerning what to make of these astonishing claims of Jesus. Either he made these claims knowing they were false and therefore he was a liar. You can't really pretend to be God and string people along, and still be a good person. It doesn't really matter if you're the best teacher in the world, and have amazing things to share, if your whole life is a lie.

Alternatively, Jesus made these claims because he believed them to be true but in reality they were not, which makes him at best deceived or a lunatic.

The only other option is that Jesus was who He claimed to be, God in human form, and Lord of all things. When it comes to the astonishing claims made by Jesus, there are only three conclusions that we can choose from: He is the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic. He cannot be just a nice man with a beard.

Staggering implications

What if He is who He claims to be?

Part of the drama of this movie is the increasing evidence that perhaps this Kris Kringle really is Santa. Every character in the story has to decide for themselves what they believe about Kris Kringle. Some want the old man declared insane and put away in a hospital for the mentally ill. But many others are ready to support him as the real Santa Claus, to the point where they launch a protest with badges and posters saying, "I believe". There's a court case and it ends with the judge deciding that if people choose to believe in Santa, and that Kris Kringle is Santa, then that's a decision for each person to make and not the court. He dismisses the case against Kris

What do you believe about Jesus? What about this child born in Bethlehem? What if his claims are true? Think for a moment about the incredible implications. What if there is that awesome Someone who knows your name, who knows when you are sleeping, and knows when you're awake? And yes, he knows when you've been bad or good, and yet, he loves you and longs for you to know and love him.

What if this child in Bethlehem really is the miracle of the manger? What if this Jesus really is who he claims to be? If he is, then you and I have a decision to

make and it is a matter of eternal significance for each one of us. What we decide about this child born in Bethlehem not only determines our eternal destiny, it also determines our earthly direction as well.

We cannot accept his claims without also recognizing that he has staked his claim on our lives. If he is who he says he is, then all of his promises are true. He really can wipe away a painful past and take away our burden of guilt and regret. He can give us a whole new reason to live and fill us with the fullness of his love, his life, his grace. It means it's all true.

The miracle of the manger is that God became flesh and lived among us. He came not so he could send us to eternal punishment but to set us free. God became man so that we could become children of God. John 1:12 *He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.*

If you will open your heart to Christ and trust Him to be exactly who He claimed to be, you will not be disappointed. If you have not yet believed, this could be your best Christmas so far – how by accepting that Jesus is able to do all he claimed, and more, and asking him to forgive you and to fill you with his grace and power. If you already believe you should probably do the same, because you can never have enough of God and we need to be reminded that Jesus is able to do all he claimed, and more. Is it possible? Could He be who He claims to be? I believe! Do you?