

## Once Upon a Time...

A sermon based on John 1:1-18

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time...there was a little girl born to a rather affluent. They named her Isabel, "promise of God," a beautiful name for a beautiful child. She instantly Daddy's little princess.

Isabel was an only child. Her parents loved her dearly and worked very hard to make sure she would always have the best...the best clothes, the best toys, the best schools. Everything she could ever want, everything she ever asked for, her parents withheld nothing from their daughter, the pride and joy of her life.

Now, she wasn't a spoiled, rich brat. She worked hard to show her thanks for everything her parents did for her. Life honestly couldn't get any better for Isabel...and then she met him...Henry. He was her prince charming, an aspiring lawyer with loads of promise. Her parents couldn't have picked out a more handsome, respectful, well-behaved man for her daughter themselves. It was a match made in heaven, at least that's what everyone was saying.

And you know how it goes. They went off together and lived happily ever after...well, at least until their trust fund money ran out and their parents cut them off. You see, it was good living for a couple of years, the upper class parties, the 4-star restaurants, the expensive shopping trips.

And then, Henry's law firm lost a few major clients, underwent a pretty serious federal investigation for some shading dealings, had to cut a lot of positions, and Henry, through no fault of his own, but being one of the lower people on the totem pole, got the ax. Isabel unexpectedly got pregnant, had to drop out of school. They had to downsize their apartment, the close quarters started wearing on their relationship. The arguments got worse as Henry couldn't find work and Isabel couldn't get off the couch.

And...well...today, Isabel work at a nearby diner, can't find someone regular to watch her two-year old. And Henry, who knows where Henry is now?

Do you think Disney would buy the rights to this plot? I'm not so sure Dreamworks would even touch it, and they've been the ones to produce some fairly odd "fairytales," like the Shrek series. But why not? It fits so well in line with what we're familiar with, and yet it's missing the one important detail that makes those movies the millions of dollars...the happy ending.

But, isn't that real life? At times, don't you feel like you're living a story without a happy ending? Oh sure, Christmas time, it's wonderful, magical even, a time to spend with our loved ones, and for at least a few days, it seems like nothing's wrong.

But how long does that usually last? A week? A few days? Can't even make it through Christmas? I think we'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who would honestly, HONESTLY, have nothing to worry about or complain about or struggle with.

Financials problems, work troubles, relationship struggles, health hardships, personal letdowns, people disappointing you coupled with everything that's going wrong outside of your personal bubble (just

open up the newspaper or turn on the TV or even just drive down the streets of Fairbanks and you'll see), it's not easy to find the silver lining in each day, is it? And we all know who's to blame, right? Sin. Sin in the world. Sin in society. Sin in me.

It all starts with me. I was born in sin, just like every person since Adam and Eve has been. And that sin infects and affects everything I do. Poor stewardship of the money God has given to me turns into financial problems. My laziness at work or unwillingness to be a team player often causes job troubles. People continue to disappoint me, but it's not like I haven't disappointed people or damaged relationships before by being unreliable, difficult to be around, downright negative or condescending towards them.

And when you have everyone in the world who's in the exact same boat, it's no fairytale. And Bible passages like, "The soul who sins is the one who will die," and "The wages of sin is death" don't exactly instill an expectation of a fairytale ending for any of us, does it? No, it points us to death, to Satan, to hell, a nightmare.

That's just half of the story, however. The season of Christmas, and especially John's gospel here this morning, tells the rest of the story. And it's not a fairytale. It's better. It's reality for you and me. It starts with its own "once upon a time." Here, though, it's "in the beginning..."

Now, it wasn't exactly your typical fairytale beginning. Mary and Joseph, your two run of the mill expecting parents, arriving at, not at the flashy kingdom of Jerusalem, but low key Bethlehem. And in a stable, the Christ-child was born, so meek, so lowly, so precious. But his birth instantly garnered attention, with shepherds as the first visitors, but sent by a host of angels, even greater than royal heralds. Unexpected but what an awesome beginning to our reality.

But in truth, that's not the beginning. The story began long before Bethlehem, didn't it? John's words, "in the beginning," don't they remind you of a different beginning? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...through him all things were made" sounds rather similar to "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

It takes us back to a different beginning, where it really was like a fairy tale in the Garden of Eden...at first. Adam and Eve, lived in paradise. They walked with God, talked with God, were perfect like God. Doesn't get any better than that! But in a matter of moments, they lost it all. One simple temptation, given into, and their world became just like ours, filled with sin. Their fates entangled with ours, the fearful expectation of God's eternal judgment.

And then, the unexpected twist. I don't know if you've sensed it in "fairytale" movies lately, but they seem to really key in on these unexpected twists. Like in Frozen (yes, I've seen Frozen!), you'd think Hans is Anna's prince charming all the way until the last 15 minutes, when he tries to leave her for dead and then Kristoff is the one trying to save her. Makes sense. But then, he can't save her from freezing to death, and neither can her sister Elsa, but the act of true love that really saves Anna is her own act of love in protecting Elsa from Hans. Wow! Did not see that coming.

Well, here's Eden's unexpected twist. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." "In the beginning was the Word." In the beginning was God's word of promise to give us our fairytale ending. Take a walk through

Scripture, through the Old Testament prophets, and you see more words, more promises building and building towards the climax of today, Jesus, the Savior, the Word is born.

You know, why call Jesus the Word? It's all about him. Since "in the beginning," it's all about him and what he did for us. As John writes, it's a story "full of grace and truth." Today is just the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise, but we know the ending. Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, saved us from our sins, rose from the dead, victorious over Satan.

You know, our personal stories may not look all that great. We each have a lot we deal with on a daily basis because sin. But the ending is the same. Jesus, the Word, lived, died, rose...for you. Jesus, the Word, took away sins...for you. Jesus, the Word, has won heaven...for you.

Fairytales, they fill us with hope that happily-ever-afters still exist out there. Christmas is a time when so many hold out hope that things will get better. Friends, the Word fills us with a different hope, a sure, confident hope of a certain happy ending. This will pass, and when it does, we will be re-united with our true love, our God, in heaven, forever. And that's no fairytale. It's our joyful reality, this Christmas, and every day! Amen.