

The movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” is based on the short story, *The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale* (1943), by Phillip Van Doren Stern. Yet the movie is how people everywhere have become familiar with the story about George Bailey that has become a Christmas season viewing tradition. The movie is considered one of the most loved films of all time. Christmas is often the time of year when people ask themselves if they have *A Wonderful Life*.

In the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” George Bailey had a gift that he wasn’t sure he wanted. His gift was the gift of life. He thought his life was falling apart. He was convinced that he was going to lose his business, his livelihood—lose everything. He faced prison for something he hadn’t done. And as a result, his family was facing the prospect of public shame and poverty.

In desperation, he pleads with his arch-enemy (Mr. Potter) for a loan on his life insurance. Potter gleefully observes, “George, you’re worth more dead than alive!” And thus, George Bailey decides that his only solution is to throw himself off the bridge into the frigid waters below so that his family would at least have the money from his life insurance.

But then God steps in through an angel named Clarence who is sent to earth to stop George Bailey before he can take his life. But how do you convince a man that the gift he wants to throw away is far too valuable to be thrown away, even when he says, “I wish I had never been born.” The angel’s solution? To grant George Bailey’s wish and show him what the world would be like if he had never been born. Here’s a brief scene that comes after George jumps in the water to save Clarence, who had jumped in the water to save George.

[VIEW 1:42:29 to 1:45:50 “I Wish I Had Never Been Born”]

So, as George tries to get back to his home, he finds out that the town has become a den of iniquity and evil. The pharmacist has become the town drunk. George’s brother Harry dies because George wasn’t around, so hundreds of men also died in the war. Mary, his wife, ends up becoming a wretched, dejected and lonely woman. George Bailey’s absence from the world he lived in got me thinking about what it would have been like if someone else had never been born.

Years ago, a book called, *If, History Rewritten*, asked a number of intriguing questions, such as: What if the Moors had won the Crusades? What if Louis XVI had been a strong, firm king? What if General Lee had won at the battle of Gettysburg? What if John Wilkes Booth had missed Abraham Lincoln? But an even more important question is this: What if Jesus had never been born? In the handout, that I hope you keep with your Christmas cards, Jim Henry says...

We Would Not Know What God Is Like. From the beginning of human history, we’ve been hungry to know who God is, and God revealed what he is like by sending his Son. That’s why Isaiah wrote that God became “*Immanuel, God with us.*” Otherwise, God would have no face, no ears, no heart that we could

understand, because, as Jesus said, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9); and “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30). If Jesus had not come on Christmas, we would have no knowledge of what God is like. We would not understand how he could identify with us and how we could relate to him.

We Would Have No Personal Victory. The shepherds near Bethlehem (in Luke 2) may have been watching sheep that were to be taken to Jerusalem to be offered as sacrifices to God. So while the Lamb of God was being born in a manger, lambs were being prepared as a sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel. Had Jesus not come, there would have been no salvation from sin. According to 1 John 3:8, the Son of God came to destroy the devil’s work. The Greek word for “devil” is *diabolos*, which means “one who slanders.” Jesus came to break the one who slanders. He came to break that bondage and to give us victory over the sins that entrap us. “*Death has been swallowed up in victory*” because Jesus came (1 Corinthians 15:54).

We Would Have No Universal Victory. We look around and see despots and rulers and military regimes. We see injustice and poverty and wonder, Will it ever be made right? Isaiah 9:6–7 says, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*” It hasn’t happened yet, but it will, says Jim Henry.

If Jesus had never been born what would our lives be like? What would the world be like? Imagine the world without Jesus. There are some people today who think the world would have been better off without Jesus. But then Christmas would be nothing more than pine trees, presents and parties. Did the birth of Jesus really matter?

I’m convinced that trying to celebrate Christmas without Jesus is impossible. Jesus Christ has made an enormous difference in the world and in human lives. Jesus changed peoples’ lives: the lame walk, the blind see, the dead are raised. He ate with those of low status. He chose disciples from every sort of background. He showed that all human beings have dignity; we bear the image of God. The first hospitals began in in the Middle Ages because of Christian people. All but one of the first 123 colleges in colonial America were Christian institutions. Literacy came to the common people so they could read the Bible. Languages were put into writing, again, so they could read God’s word. Slavery was abolished in England and in this country because of Christian activists. The roots of modern science are in Christian discoveries. Women were given equal rights because of Christ’s teaching.

Spiritually speaking, if Jesus had never been born:

- We would not realize the great love of God for the world (John 3:16).
- We would remain in darkness (John 8:12).
- We would not be free from sin (John 8:34).
- We would continue to live in fear (John 6:20).
- Our salvation would never come (1 John 3:5).
- Death would not be conquered (John 8:43).

- We would not inherit the Kingdom of heaven (Luke 12:32).

Ralph Andrus says, “But Jesus DID come to earth! He is the fulfillment of every Old Testament prophecy about the promised Messiah. He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Heavenly angels announced his birth. Shepherds visited him.”

He LIVED a perfect life.

He TOUCHED people and healed them.

He RAISED people from the dead.

He WALKED on water.

He FED the multitudes.

He DIED on the cross.

He HAS RISEN from the dead.

He HAS PAID our debt of sin.

He IS SEATED at the right hand of the Father.

He INTERCEDES for us.

He LISTENS to the cry of our heart.

He LOVES us with an everlasting love.

He FORGIVES our sin.

Once again, hear the glorious good news of Christmas: *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

Jesus is born! Because he came, it's a wonderful life! Amen.