

Cartoon offers Christmas lesson

Stanley J. Konieczny/CNS

For 38 Christmases, countless families have gathered in front of the television to watch a children's holiday classic, Charles Schultz's animated "A Charlie Brown Christmas." It is a real holiday treat, but like so many gifts, the deeper, more profound meaning can be lost.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount echoes throughout this 30-minute cartoon, challenging viewers to find the true meaning of Christmas. The eight Beatitudes of Matthew's Gospel are woven throughout.

Jesus prefaced each Beatitude with an acknowledgment of happiness: "How blessed are they ..." And there is an overall happiness about the children in the Peanuts' cast as they ice skate, dance, throw snowballs and try to catch snowflakes on their tongues.

Yet, one little boy, the hapless Charlie Brown, mourns his lack of understanding of Christmas. He expresses his hunger and thirst for something beyond all the commercialism and consumerism.

Now, after more than 38 viewings,



we know that Charlie Brown realizes the Beatitude promise of satisfaction and comfort.

Just as the Beatitudes are a call to Christian action, Lucy, the amateur psychiatrist, encourages Charlie Brown to get involved in order to overcome his holiday doldrums.

Charlie Brown tries his hand first at directing the Christmas pageant and later at buying a Christmas tree for the auditorium. Both projects are seemingly disastrous, and Charlie Brown gains only the ridicule of his peers. He concludes that he has absolutely no understanding of Christmas.

Then enters Linus Van Pelt, bearer of the original "security blanket." Linus stands as an icon of the Beatitudes.

The cartoon tot readily agrees to explain to Charlie Brown what Christmas is all about. In Linus' happy purity of heart we can see God.

Linus begins his soliloquy with a simple request, "Lights, please." It is



United Feature Syndicate Inc.

Families have enjoyed Charles Schultz's animated "A Charlie Brown Christmas" for 38 years. In the cartoon, Charlie Brown complains about the overwhelming materialism he sees amongst everyone during the Christmas season. When he fails to restore the proper spirit as director of the school Christmas pageant, he turns to his friend Linus to learn what the real meaning of Christmas is.

less stage command and more a meek prayer asking for guidance and betraying the gentleness of one who already has inherited God's kingdom or at least is not far from it.

Despite his fear of memorizing lines for the holiday program, Linus quotes by heart the Gospel story about angels announcing a wonderful birth to shepherds watching their flocks at night.

Watch closely. As Linus recounts how the angels told the shepherds not to be afraid, he loosens his clutch on the ever-present, frayed, blue security blanket, which slips to the stage floor. As together as he seems, even Linus is called to greater faith by the good news of Christ's coming.

Then the cast gathers outside under a starry December sky. Here Linus proves himself a true child of God, a peacemaker bringing reconciliation between Charlie Brown and his friends.

More important, Linus helps the children reconcile themselves to the season's real meaning. Linus could well have been ridiculed by his playmates, but he took the risk to make the kingdom of heaven more real for his friends.

"That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown," says Linus as he concludes his proclamation of the birth of a Savior.

Konieczny is a seminarian at Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Ill.

SNEAK PREVIEW

The stories appearing on pages 9, 10 and 11 are taken from the Christmas edition of "Faith Alive!"—an adult faith formation package that explores what it means to live as a follower of Jesus Christ in contemporary times. The Catholic Courier will begin to carry "Faith Alive" regularly—first online and then in print—starting in early 2004. We hope you enjoy this preview.

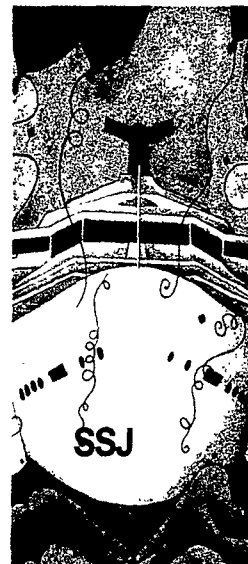


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