

**First Presbyterian Church Wausau, WI**  
**A Long Time Ago, in a Galilee Far, Far Away: Warning - Spoilers Ahead**  
**Christmas Eve 5:00 pm**  
**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

I was a kid when Star Wars came to the movie theater. It is one of the first movies I can remember seeing on the big screen. And it had a profound impact on my childhood. Since my family didn't attend church, I didn't have a basis of faith. Star Wars introduced me to a kind of spirituality. It was a spirituality of dualism, the idea of a cosmic drama of good versus evil. The much quoted phrase "May the force be with you" was not simply a line from a popular movie, it implied that there was something greater, something "other" out there – the Force. Something that took an interest in the lives of mundane creatures.

To say I was obsessed with Star Wars would be an understatement. Like most kids at the time I was fascinated with the story and the characters. Merchandising in the 70's was nothing like it is today, so we kids improvised – using ponchos or blankets as Jedi robes and broomsticks as light sabers and staging epic battles in our yards. I alternated wanting to be the young hero Luke Skywalker, the crafty and brilliant Princess Leia, and the mysterious villain Darth Vader. And it was with great anticipation that I awaited the arrival of the second movie, The Empire Strikes Back.

Now director George Lucas had a major surprise for fans in the second movie. So remarkable was this new development, that Lucas did everything he could to keep the secret hidden from the public. He didn't want anyone to spoil the surprise. Even the actors were left in the dark, except for Mark Hamill, who was only told moments before, so that his reaction would be appropriate. Sources say that only about a half dozen people knew that Darth Vader was Luke's father until The Empire Strikes Back was released. It was such a shocking revelation, that most people assumed that Vader was lying in order to trick Luke into joining his evil cause. No one expected this revelation.

This certainly put a new twist on the story. Luke Skywalker was the hero – training to become a Jedi Knight and save the Republic from the evil Empire. But in order to do that, Luke would have to defeat Darth Vader. Could Luke kill his own father, his own flesh and blood, evil though he was? Was that the only alternative? Or was there another possibility? Perhaps instead of destroying him, could Luke bring his wayward father to redemption? Could the evil Lord Vader be turned from the Dark Side of the Force, or was that an impossibility?

Now this brings me to the subject of spoilers. George Lukas was so secretive about the relationship between Darth Vader and Luke because he didn't want someone – an actor or crew member – to leak the information to the public and spoil the surprise. Even with the limited

technology in 1980, a much anticipated book release or movie or television program could be spoiled by just one person who neglected to keep the secret. Some of you might remember one of the earliest cliffhangers ever on television. For an entire summer, people wondered and speculated about exactly who shot J.R.? Imagine if there had been a spoiler – a leak of information prior the opening episode of the next season.

No one likes a spoiler. And that word spoiler can refer to the information itself or the one who leaks the information. But with social media, keeping a secret now can prove difficult. I have yet to see the new Star Wars movie *The Force Awakens*, and I have been very careful to avoid spoilers of any kind. For those of you who have seen it, I don't want to know anything. So don't tell me! Don't be "that person." That person who ruins the surprise for someone else.

Sometimes spoilers aren't that bad. For example, in the Star Wars franchise, when the fourth, fifth and sixth movies were introduced, fans knew the outcome even before seeing the movies. We knew that cute little blood boy, Anakin Skywalker, was going to grow up to become Darth Vader. We knew it up front. But that knowledge didn't keep people from going to see the movies. We wanted to know how it happened. What caused that kind and generous boy to become one of the most feared villains in the galaxy? The details were in the story, and in the end, everything started making sense.

So you may be wondering, what does this all have to do with the Christmas story? With that tiny little baby who was placed in a manger after being born in the strangest of circumstances. There are actually some surprising similarities between the two stories, enough to make me think that George Lucas was more than a little familiar with it. But my point is, I think that Jesus is God's spoiler for humanity. In the story of Jesus Christ, we learn how everything is going to turn out in the end, and far from ruining the surprise, that knowledge gives us hope.

To understand the story of Jesus, we have to go backward in time a little bit. The people of Israel had had a complicated existence. God had chosen them, brought them out of slavery in Egypt, and made covenants with them, contractual promises. Throughout their history, Israel was instructed by God in how to live righteously, or the right way. But Israel kept messing up, and their world was filled with violence and greed and oppression. Even though they turned from God, the wise prophets would come along to remind them of their responsibilities to God and to encourage them to trust that in the end, God would make all things right. They trusted the promises God made through those ancient covenants, and longed for the day, when God's promise of justice, compassion, peace, and equality would finally be realized.

Some of the prophets began to speak of a Messiah, One who was chosen by God to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise for a bright future. It was said that the Messiah would come from the house of David, the greatest king in Israel's history. Legends began to be spun about how

the Messiah would be a great conqueror and would restore Israel to its days of glory. And in the first century, when Israel was occupied by the Romans, the people longed for the one who would bring them out of darkness. Wannabe messiahs and revolutionaries would pop up periodically to lead rebellion against Rome, but they were quickly thwarted.

And then a baby was born. A vulnerable infant, born to nondescript people from a small nowhere town. In addition to his parents, Mary and Joseph, who had been let in on the secret by means of an angel, a messenger of God, a few shepherds were made privy to his identity. Astrologers from Persia saw a confluence of stars, and, believing it to be a signal of a royal birth, they took to the road heading west in hopes of greeting this newborn king.

But not just a newborn king. A unique child – unique in that he was born of the Spirit of God. A child who would grow up to save not only the people of Israel, but all people. Who would have expected this shocking turn of events? Who would have guessed that this was God's intention? That the fulfillment of the ancient promises would come not through military conquest, but with a vision of peace for all people. That Jesus Christ would be the embodiment of God's promise to humanity and through him that promise would be fulfilled. Talk about a plot twist! No one saw that coming!

Our world today is not much different than that of the first century. There is still war and poverty, injustice and servitude, inequality and oppression. We just have more technology through which to hurt others. People are still crying out to God for release from those things that hold them captive. People are still crying out for peace and justice. People still long for healing and wholeness. People still desire for this world to be put right, as God intended. And people hope for a better future for their children.

It seems it would be easy to fall into despair. To simply give up the idyllic dreams for something better. After all, have things really changed in 2000 years? Should we just give up, concede victory to the oppressors and hunker down, getting by as best we can?

We could. I suppose, we could. Let the Dark Side win. Luke could have given up on his father's chance of redemption. Luke could have succumbed to the lure of power and become an agent of evil like Darth Vader. But he didn't give up. And neither do we.

Each year, each Christmas we tell the story again. How God stepped into human history and through Jesus Christ, showed us a more excellent way. Jesus is God's spoiler to us. In Christ we receive a message of truth – a message of love and peace, joy and hope. A message that flies in opposition to the hatred and fear in our world. Through Christ we have been given a vision of what God wants for our world. And through Christ we have been given the promise of the

fulfillment of that vision. This is God's surprise, the spoiler for the world. This is one spoiler that it's okay to share.