

Bad Neighborhood
Short lesson for fifth grade
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Have you ever been in a bad neighborhood? One that felt dangerous?
I have. Many times.

There was the time that I was in Chicago at a big trade show (that's where businesses gather to show off their products) and a couple people decided they would walk back to the hotel. We went through an area that was mostly under bridges with tall fences on either side of the road. Every person we passed looked like they might be dangerous.

Then there was the time that we went to Philadelphia. Martha wanted to eat at this place that was on TV for making the best steak sandwiches. We took a cab to the place and as we rode it started to look worse and worse. The buildings were all run-down and boarded up. The people started to look a lot different from us. By the time we arrived at the little restaurant, I was more worried about getting back out alive than which sandwich to order.

I've driven through rough neighborhoods in Hoboken, New Jersey trying to get to an airport when it was late at night and as I drove through the neighborhood every time I had to stop at a red light all the dozens of people standing around the corners would stare at me in my car.

We're sometimes in dangerous situations.

I saw a news story about a soldier in Afghanistan. Our government forces were paying a team of Afghan soldiers to be their guides and interpreters. These guides worked with them for some time and our forces began to trust them. Until one day, the guides worked with the Taliban forces to lead the soldiers into a trap. The soldiers went into a valley and were ambushed. The enemy was on all

sides of them and they were pinned down behind rocks beside the road so they couldn't escape the valley.

They called for helicopters to come but the copters didn't come. The enemy started closing in on them and many soldiers were being wounded and killed. Two soldiers were able to get out of the valley in a truck just as the shooting started.

Even though they were safe, they turned the truck back around to get their friends. With one person driving the truck and another standing in the back and shooting at the enemy they drove back into the valley. The enemy was hiding along the road on all sides, and as the truck drove through they rushed at them shooting from very close range.

The soldiers made it to one of their teammates and pulled them into the truck, and then drove back through the bullets to get them out of the valley.

Then they turned around and did this 8 more times. They came even though by the end they knew that they were only rescuing the bodies of their friends.

Why would I tell this story at Christmas?

<Let them answer.>

Think about what heaven is like. Angels singing, perfect happiness and nothing to even make you sad. God sent Jesus, and Jesus wanted, to come to a place with only a little of the joys and beauties of heaven but a lot of the worst things that man can create. For Jesus, this was a really bad neighborhood where there were dangerous people on every corner and they all know you're different from them. And most of them hate you and are jealous of you just for being different.

And he came here as a baby. The smallest and weakest he could come.

Jesus didn't take a wrong turn and end up here. He wasn't here for fun that turned dangerous.

He came here on a mission to save his family. Like the soldier, he came here to rescue us. And like the soldier, he comes back every day into a world that is ugly and hates him, just to pull a few people back to safety.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate it the same way we would if we were lost in a terrible, dangerous place and our best friend came to pick us up and take us home.