



# Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

**C**loudy with a Chance of Meatballs is a very fun family film that, though light-hearted, has some depth. More than a one-course spaghetti dinner; it is the full meal-deal. Still short of the high-bar standard set by Pixar films, both in artistic and narrative forms, Sony Pictures Animation (Monster House, Open Season) has improved its credentials in this blossoming genre, and the proof is in the pudding. The story is creative, the animation is cool, the humor is clean, and the voice talent very capable. All in all, it is four-star worthy fare.

We meet Flint Lockwood (voice of Bill Hader) as a kid in school. A typical nerd, he is enamored with inventors and inventions. Adorning his bedroom wall are posters, but not of rock stars. These are of scientists: Tesla and Einstein. His heroes are the creators who have impacted society enduringly, not with transitory music. But as a kid, this is tantamount to social suicide, and he is mocked and ridiculed. His invention of spray-on shoes, to overcome the problem of untied shoelaces, solves the issue but leaves him with permanent “shoes” . . . and a lasting badge of his ineptness.

Cut ahead a decade and Flint is still inventing things that don’t work or contribute to his town. Still an outcast, he “works” in a science lab constructed above his parents’ house, a crazy contraption that is reached via an elevator in a Port-potty. His mother has died and his father Tim (voice of James Caan) wants him to come to work in his fishing tackle store. But Flint wants to pursue his dream of being a genius inventor and somehow saving the world.

Cloudy portrays a young man wanting to contribute to society. Despite being a social outcast, he wants to make a difference for the good. We all want this. We want our lives

to count for something. We want to contribute, to help make things better. God has made us this way. We were made to function socially in community. We all have different gifts and talents (Rom. 12:4-8). As we accept this, we can exercise these God-given gifts and talents for the benefit of ourselves (as our livelihood), our neighbors (who we know, or should know, personally), and our broader community. Like the parts of a body, as we work together we enhance the common good (1 Cor. 12).

Flint’s town, though, is in the midst of an economic depression. Swallow Falls is on a small island in the middle of the

ocean and has relied on its sardine cannery as its main source of income. When the world woke up and realized sardines are yucky, their economy went into mercurial meltdown, leaving the islanders with megatons of sardines to eat or dispose of. And there are very few ways you can eat sardines before you get sick of them, just like the Israelites got tired of manna for 40 years in the desert (Num. 11:6).

To overcome this problem, the town mayor (voice of Bruce Campbell) comes up with a scheme to turn the liability into an asset by creating an entertainment theme park out of sardines, much like Disneyland but with the canned fish. But during the grand opening celebrations, misfit Flint manages to

Remember, before showing clips from movies, be sure you have a license to do so. Check out Church Video License to be sure you are legal. [www.cvli.com](http://www.cvli.com)

mar the events, further ostracizing himself in the eyes of his fellow townsfolk. To make matters worse, a national TV news channel has sent an intern weather reporter Sam Sparks (voice of Anna Faris) to cover the ceremony.

If Flint offers a perspective on contributing to society, Sam offers one on conforming to society. She is all you would expect from a meteorologist. Perky, pretty, blonde with big bright eyes: an “airhead” with her head in the clouds. But later we discover the truth of Sam Sparks: she is a nerd-wannabe. As a kid, she had big glasses and a ponytail, and a yearning for the scientific tools of weather-forecasting. But she realized that others would look down on her if she followed her desires like this, so she adopted the expected visage and characteristics of a successful weather person. In short, she conformed to society’s expectations.

The Apostle Paul has strong words for followers of Christ on this matter: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). The world wants to mold us into its image, making us who it wants us to be. Sam understood this implicitly, and realized to get the job of her dreams she would have to sacrifice who she really was on the altar of corporate expectation. She gave up her real personality and took on a fake one, just so she could be in front of the cameras. Likewise, the world wants to grind us down, tearing us away from Jesus.

Jesus intends to inaugurate a new kingdom, one where we can be who we are meant to be. To do this, we must allow ourselves to be transformed from within. We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), and the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), and can have our own minds renewed. By meditating on the Word of God and drawing on the Spirit’s power, we can experience this transformation and turn our back on cultural conformation. To her benefit, Sam ultimately finds this out, too.

Flint and Sam come into contact when his latest invention, a machine that transforms water into food, goes out of control and blasts into the atmosphere . . . where there are clouds full of water. The first “rainfall” is cheeseburgers, and is seen as a miracle, like manna from heaven. And when Flint realizes he can control what is delivered from the sky, he begins to take orders. The mayor even sees a new way to exploit this apparent blessing. But predictably, matters get

complicated until chaos ensues threatening the entire globe. The world needs a savior, and Flint is that man!

Against this big picture scenario, the real heart and theme of the film is much smaller and down-home: communicating “I love you”. Flint’s mom was a good communicator, but his una-browed dad has a different conversation style: “Son, not every sardine was meant to swim,” he tells Flint early on. But Flint replies, “I don’t understand fishing metaphors, dad!” They are not on the same wavelength. His dad is an uninspiring and practical man, who goes about his work with an air of defeatism. He does not understand Flint’s world or his dreams. Here is a giant generational gap; Tim cannot understand his son’s inventions.

Another character, Earl (voice of Mr. T), the local martial arts-practicing policeman, presents quite the opposite picture: “I love you son,” he tells his boy. “I know dad. You tell me every day.” Plain and clear, he tells his son in words he understands, words every son wants to hear from his dad. Even grown-up sons are like little boys who want to hear that their dad loves them and is proud of them.

As a father, I am called to raise my children to be the people God made them to be (Prov. 22:6). Yet, I am called to do this in a spirit of love and encouragement. All children are different, they are unique no two exactly alike. What works for one may not work for another, and I am finding this out personally. But somehow they need to feel our paternal love. And we fathers must strive to find the love language that works for our children, especially our sons.

One author said men are from Mars and women from Venus in their communication styles. Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs says we may all be from different planets. The trick is to find which planet your son is from and learn that language. That, or invent a magic translator like Flint!

Copyright ©2010, Martin Baggs

Martin works as an engineering manager in the high tech industry. He leads a monthly film review group at Mosaic Church in Portland, Oregon. He writes film responses from a biblical perspective on his blog: [www.mosaicmovieconnect-group.blogspot.com](http://www.mosaicmovieconnect-group.blogspot.com)

Contact: martinbaggs@gmail.com

