

## First Sunday after Christmas – December 29, 2019

### Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my Son.” 19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

How are you doing this morning? Wednesday was the big day. A lot of what we all did the last couple of weeks was to prepare for the celebration of Christmas. Was it another successful holiday season? How do you feel? You may feel tired out from all that had to get done. There was the baking, the gift-buying, the decorating, the card and letter writing, the special church services. Did you get all the presents that you wanted? Did mom and dad wrap that special gift or gifts and get them put under the tree? It could have been what you expected or maybe it totally surprised you or maybe you were a little disappointed. And yes, now we are four days past Christmas, it went by so quickly. Maybe you are a little down—your break in the normal routine is nearing an end. Sure we have New Year’s coming up the first part of this week. But after that it’s back to work, back to school by the end of the week and we start working our way toward another Christmas in December of 2020.

In our Gospel lesson for this morning we see some reactions to the first Christmas. One of those reactions was that of King Herod. Now Herod was a different type of king than David or Solomon. He did rule the people of Judah, but he was still under the control of the Roman government. They had appointed him and there were still Roman officials and armies around who could tell Herod what to do. History tells us that he was a very violent man—he tortured and put many people to death, including his wife, three of his sons, and many other relatives. He was very protective of his place on his throne and if there was any threat to his reign as king, he made sure that he took care of it. He was protective because actually the throne did not belong to him. He was not a descendant of David, not even a Jew, but an Idumean, one who was from Edom. So he did all that he could to protect himself.

Then the Wise Men, the Magi, came along. They had followed the star from the east and had come to worship the new born king, so they went to Jerusalem to talk to the current king, Herod. He asked his priests and teachers about it who said from the prophecies that the child would be in Bethlehem. So Herod sent the Wise Men on their way, asking them to come back and let him know where the baby was so that he could worship him.

It sounds like a nice thing for Herod to do, to want to go and see this new king, but that was not his true reaction to the Christmas news. Rather he was disturbed. If this baby was born king as the men from the East had said, then the child could someday become a threat to Herod’s

throne. But Herod was not going to let that happen. He would search for the child to kill him and take away any threat to his rule as king.

When the Wise Men did not return he was furious. So in typical Herodian fashion he went to the most violent extreme to protect himself. To be on the safe side he ordered the death of not just the baby boys, but all those up to age two. This included not just those in Bethlehem, but also those in the area around the town. He was not going to let any baby boy grow up to become a threat to his throne! The news of the birth of this new king was not welcome to Herod and his immediate reaction was one of hatred, jealousy and mistrust.

There is another man with a Christmas reaction in our section from Matthew this morning and that is Joseph. He had been through a lot lately. First he had found out that the woman he was pledged to be married to was going to have a child, which wasn't even his own! The pregnancy progressed and when it came time for the census he traveled down to Bethlehem with his 9-month pregnant wife. Finally they had the baby, not in any hospital, but in a stable. Later, when he had moved his family to a house in Bethlehem, the Wise Men visited the young family, bearing expensive gifts. It must have been quite the time for Joseph.

Which brings us to the night of our text: "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him'" (v. 13). Things had been going okay but now this happened. Herod had become angry and wanted to come after Jesus. So Joseph was supposed to pack up his family in order to travel down to Egypt. Put yourself in his place for a moment. Getting a call in the middle of the night, having to pack up in order to take your family to a foreign country. No two hour drive down the freeway, no moving service to come and help you. Just go with what you could carry.

Joseph could have given up. Why should I flee? Herod isn't after me. He wants Jesus. This isn't even my child. Haven't I put up with enough already? I don't want to live as foreigner and an outlaw! But listen to Joseph's reaction. "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod" (v. 14-15a). Joseph did not debate or delay his decision. He went immediately under the cover of night. Joseph's reaction was based on belief in what he had heard in an earlier dream, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (1:20-21). Joseph knew the importance of this king that had been born and wanted to do all he could to help. God was watching over this family and taking care of them, he would not let his plan of salvation be frustrated. Twice in our text Matthew mentions that the prophecy was being fulfilled. God was fulfilling what he had spoken through the prophets many years before. This marked the beginning of a lifetime of Jesus fulfilling the saving promises God had made in the Old Testament.

When it comes to our reaction to the message of Christmas, how do we respond? Don't we sometimes react as Herod did? Now wait just a minute, you might say, I didn't go out to slaughter any innocent children in order to try and kill Jesus! Now that may be right, but yet there are times when we are like Herod in that we oppose Jesus or ignore what he came to do. If it were up to us and our sinful nature we would not want to have anything to do with him. Let Jesus come into my heart to rule as king? No, I would rather try to do things my own way. I want to go out to all the holiday parties and maybe overdo it because I deserve it after how hard I have worked this past year, it doesn't matter what God thinks. I want to go see that R-rated movie with my friends, it doesn't matter what God thinks. When my spouse or loved one does

something that angers me I have a right to treat them badly for a while, it doesn't matter what God thinks. We all have some Herod inside of us that does not want to do what God wants us to. We find ourselves on a path heading away from our King, a path that leads towards the fires of hell, not wanting anything to do with the child that was born in Bethlehem

Yet that child which was born in Bethlehem is the only solution, our only hope. As we were reminded in these past days, Jesus came to earth to take on human flesh. So that he could live a perfect life in our place. So that he could die a perfect death in our place. So that he could rise from the dead and show his victory. It was the time for God's plan of salvation. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Ga 4:4,5). Despite our sinful condition, God redeemed us and bought us back. He wanted us, even when we were at our worst. He made us his sons and daughters. "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir" (Ga 4:7). God loves us as his own children and as children we inherit his gifts. Better than any gift under the tree this week, we have the gifts of the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal in heaven.

Instead of the reaction of Herod, as children of God we have the reaction of Joseph. God gives us a command in his word and we follow it. Even though the world may call us foolish or old-fashioned for holding onto such beliefs, we obey God's will even if it comes at a time in our life which isn't the most convenient, like it was for Joseph. This does not mean that as children of God we will never have moments of doubt or react as Herod did. But we have our King on our side to help us. Just as God protected Mary, Joseph and Jesus when Herod was threatening and so worked things all out for their good, he will do the same for us. As Isaiah wrote in our first lesson, "I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us...according to his compassion and many kindnesses" (Isa 63:7). We are his children and he will help us because of his grace and mercy.

At the beginning you thought about how you felt after the Christmas celebrations of the past couple of days. Maybe tired and worn out from the activity, maybe disappointed about the gifts or maybe just down about getting back to the routine. But the celebration of Christmas brings us joy! Our reaction like Herod to push away our King has been conquered. We are protected and react like Joseph to obey God's will. Our reaction to Christmas is Rejoice, because our King has Come!