

Having a Rocky Start?

Christmas 1

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Matt. 2:13-23

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, happy New Year! I hope and pray that you are having a blessed, God-pleasing start to your new year. Seeing how this is the first day of this new year, the title of this sermon may sound a little too soon. How could you possibly be having a rocky start to your new year already? And Lord willing, I hope that you are not.

Yet sadly, for some of you, some of the sad events of last year may still be weighing heavily on your hearts. Or some of you may have heard disheartening news last night before the ball dropped, ushering in 2017. Again, I hope that that is not the case, but I also know, like you, that this is a sinful world. Sin happens. Sad things happen. Heartache happens. It is an unfortunate part of this life.

Our text from the Gospel of Matthew finds another unfortunate set events taking place—only this time for our Lord and His family, Joseph and Mary. While Jesus was an infant, because He was and is God, He knows what it is to have a rocky start.

This morning, we'll look at the start that Jesus had in His life and how it affected His family, but keeping in mind that because our God has taken on human flesh, we have a God who can and does sympathize with us. He is God not only with us, but for us, even in our hardest of times in this life.

Verse 1

“Now when (the wise men) had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

Our Lord had only been born and been on earth for less than two years, and already someone wanted to put Him to death. He had not even begun to preach or teach; He may have just begun to learn to speak some words, and He had already done something wrong in the eyes of another.

Granted most of you are older than two years old, but you have probably felt that way at least once in your life. There are sometimes those that no matter what you do or try to do, you just rub the wrong way. You may not even have to say anything but to just be in the same country makes you a threat to that person or people's way of life.

Now if you are doing something against your neighbor, then you need to stop and learn to love him or her. But if you have been trying to love that person, or if it is someone you have only met for the first time, and perhaps haven't even had the chance to speak, then Romans chapter twelve can be a source of Gospel comfort for you.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12:18).” If you are trying to live in love toward your neighbor or neighbors, then you are not at fault and are doing what you can to live in peace with everyone. At the same time, you have the encouragement and comfort that you can go to your

Heavenly Father who has promised to hear your prayer that He might change the heart of your neighbor or neighbors so that they might turn and live in love with you in return.

Sadly, that was not the case for Herod. He died in fear of Jesus and having murdered many boys two years old and younger out of that fear. Scripture doesn't record whether he died in faith or not, but that doesn't change that he attempted to have Jesus killed simply for existing. Our text continues following Herod's death.

Verse 2

“(W)hen Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.”

Jesus was not the only one affected by challenges in His early years. Joseph and Mary had a lot of traveling and moving to do on account of Him as well. While it was an angel of the Lord who was telling them what to do, they may have been wondering what God's plan was for them.

Sometimes things happen in one person's life that has an effect on others' lives. You might consider Jonah. When he was told to go and preach at Nineveh, he attempted to flee God's plan. Then the Lord brought up a huge squall that shook the boat he was on and made the crew fear for their lives. They began to wonder what they had done to anger God, but as Jonah would finally admit, it wasn't about them, but about the one they had on board.

Events from the Bible, and especially the ones from the Old Testament, may have us wondering sometimes what we have done or what others around us have done to provoke the Lord, or what the Lord's plan for us even is. And yes, the Lord God does have plans for us, even today, but they work differently than they did then.

In the cases of Jonah and Joseph and Mary, we know what God desired because it is written for us in God's own words. Today, we don't have the luxury of God telling us exactly what He wants. Yet, at the same time, and in some ways, He doesn't need to. As was mentioned earlier this holiday season, the Bible was composed to follow a particular line of people for a particular reason: our salvation, which would be brought about by Joseph and Mary's child, Jesus the Christ.

Verse 3

“(Joseph, and Mary and the child Jesus) went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”

This is the second time prophecy was fulfilled directly concerning Jesus Himself—the other time mentioning Egypt—and the third prophecy to be fulfilled in this passage concerning His life, as does the passage about Rachel weeping for her children. These prophecies were made in the Old Testament about what would happen in the New Testament. But again, the Bible wasn't written to give every fact about every person who ever lived. It was written to show the line leading to the One who would bring about salvation for all of humanity, including you. That salvation would occur through Jesus by His fulfilling every prophecy of the Old Testament—including these three—and by His dying on the cross of Calvary as the Suffering Servant Isaiah had prophesied about.

So the Bible tells us what God was thinking about certain things and how He worked everything together for Jesus, but what about us? What about you? Well, God has you in mind as well—He just may not be directing you in as specific of ways as He did Jesus' ancestors. God has promised through Jesus that He would not leave you or forsake you until the end of the age, so He is still with you for Jesus' sake. Yet at the same time, God has given you—and me—a lot of freedom. Freedom to learn about the skills He has given us. Freedom to use those skills in occupations which we have some choice in choosing. Freedom to love others, and, in some cases, to love others as spouses. Yet God does not have it written anywhere that you must do this or marry this particular person. No, He has given you freedom to live as His forgiven child.

If you have chosen your job, work at it as though you're working for the Lord in this New Year. If you have met someone and made the vow to be with him or her for the rest of your life, do just that. Love your spouse because that is pleasing to God who hasn't forced you to marry that person, but desires that you keep vows that you have made to Him and to each other, in the New Year, and until you die, as you have vowed. It was for your freedom that Jesus went to Egypt, was called a Nazarene, and went to the cross of Calvary and was raised from the dead. Live the freedom He has given you—the freedom to live without fear because you have the forgiveness of sins—live that freedom in this New Year of 2017 and always. In Jesus' Name. Amen.