

The Rock: 12-20-2020

Advent 2020

Bringing in the Kingdom

First reading: Isaiah 9:1-2 (Laura)

Title: The return from lockdown (exile)

Scripture: Matthew 2:19-23

Theme:

God's plan from eternity, as Micah and Isaiah make clear for us, will find its fulfillment in this carpenter's son from the north; no matter what the world thinks it can say about the matter.

Introduction:

Well, our journey ends where it began. With angelic visits and the clear hand of God's sovereignty and providential care over His people.

In the midst of that, we found that Joseph had choices to make along the way. Life didn't just happen, as we find God's plan being moved along by the obedient choices of this young family.

It is certainly something good for us to remember. That the Bible shows us God's sovereignty, and yet at the same time the

Bible also shows us that it works itself out through the obedient "free will" of His people.

We aren't here by accident in this story, and neither is Joseph and Mary. By this time Jesus is right around three when his dad gets another visit.

"But when 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."

-Matthew 2:19-20 ESV

I think it's important as we go through this text this morning to recognize Joseph's constant obedience. His choice to obey is always working in conjunction with God's direction and sovereign hand.

Again, like his namesake from Genesis, Joseph is led and encouraged by dreams. Dreams which bring comfort as well as direction. Within that, we find Joseph's trust and obedience. In turn, we see Mary's trust in God AND in her husband.

The Story:

You see, at the outset we learned that. Mary's knew her Joseph and Joseph knew his Mary. When she told him that she had

a visit from an angel and was told she was pregnant, he struggled. Yet, he trusted.

Mary as well, when Joseph woke her in the middle of the night, telling her to pack what she can because they had to leave quickly, she did.

This season of waiting for them was now over and they could go home. Trusting his gut as it were, but doing so based on what he knows to be true. God has been faithful and consistent every step of the way, so when he is told in the dream to go home, he doesn't hesitate.

We find though, that as much as God has been consistent and faithful, so too has Herod's son Archelaus. The one who was now ruling in his place. F.F. Bruce writes this about him:

"Archelaus had all his father's defects of character with but little of his administrative and diplomatic ability."

In other words, he was simply a ruthless brute who ruled in chaos. That helps us to understand why it is that Joseph doesn't go back to Bethlehem. AS much as perhaps he would have wanted to.

So, the next logical place to go then would be the place they had left all those years before -Nazareth, where they

were originally from. Luke reminds us of that as he records the beginning of their journey:

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David..."

-Luke 2:1-4 ESV

And I wonder, how difficult this must have been. Remember from week 2 and the visit of the Magi? Laura reminded us that more than likely they had settled into a home in Bethlehem, in a place that perhaps didn't know the entire back story of Jesus.

Life would have been "easier" for them in Bethlehem, more comfort and less contention and gossip. but that too was not to be.

God wants them back where they started - in Nazareth, for many reasons. Remember, Matthew quotes Hosea 11 as the fulfillment of their return:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son."

-Hosea 11:1 ESV

But then, he throws a very vague
reference that we cannot find any direct
scripture to attach to it, when he says:
"He shall be called a Nazarene."

When, and how did Matthew come up with
that? What I've discovered is that
Matthew is very good at parallel
passages, and I think, at least for
myself our Advent reading from this
morning is a very helpful.

"But there will be no gloom for her who
was in anguish. In the former time he
brought into contempt the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali, but in the
latter time he has made glorious the way
of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the nations. The people who
walked in darkness have seen a great
light; those who dwelt in a land of deep
darkness, on them has light shone."

-Isaiah 9:1-2 ESV

Now, I leave some of this background
reading for you to do, as it will benefit
you. I am going somewhere with all of
this, so track with me.

In the times that the twelve tribes had settled in the promised land, Zebulon and Naphtali, and a little tribe called Asher settled in the northern most region.

In the area of Tyre and Sidon, the northwest coastal region, and Damascus to the northeast -this was the dark, gentile outpost if you will. The hillbilly region, and frankly not a place where any good ever came.

Really, it's one of the reasons why Nathaniel asked: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

That question was asked because they all knew the answer: No, nothing good comes from there. Yet, some 700 years before that question was asked, Isaiah challenged that notion.

For the only way light can shine in darkness is if the light is in the darkness. A great light has shone, and it is doing so from a place we least expect and in a way that we would never think.

In the exile of darkness, in the lockdown of sin and contempt, God has sent His Messiah. The Child is born, the son is given. It is quite striking here if we study this passage -because Isaiah captures the exile / exodus moments of God's people.

Verse 3 is the joy of what God has done for his people:

"You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil."

-Isaiah 9:3 ESV

Verses 4-5 pack a one two punch of God's deliverance as we see first Moses and then Gideon, two unlikely people called by God:

"For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."

-Isaiah 9:4-5 ESV

It's the standard pattern of God in using people like Moses and Gideon, two deliverers:

1-Moses brings them out from under the yoke of slavery in Egypt. Carrying the staff of a shepherd and God's authority and anointing.

2-Gideon, in the times of the judges is called by God. The smallest dude, in the

least tribe and tiniest of the clans,
with 300 people crushes the Midianites.

Victory and power through weakness.

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

-Micah 5:2 ESV

Bethlehem would be where he was born, but the deliverer would come from the north. I can only imagine the people in those days.

Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries, and these are the things they were writing. The people had to know, that even on the front end of an exile in Babylon, that God would be sending His deliverer -the promised Messiah.

Fast forward 700 years and here they come, just vagabond wanderers, journeying back from their mini-exile in Egypt:

"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. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene."

-Matthew 2:21-23 ESV

Because of the circumstances within Judah and Bethlehem, they go to settle in Nazareth, in the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali.

You just cannot write a better story. God is once again on the move. After 400 years of silence, oppression, persecution -the son given, the child born is coming home.

Much like Moses, and Gideon, His power will be found in weakness (meekness actually). The creator of the universe, is a mere toddler learning to walk and talk, to be obedient to Mom and Dad, to learn to read and write and study the scriptures.

Upon Him rests all of our hopes:

"...the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to

establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

-Isaiah 9:6b-7 ESV

How powerful! In our struggling with the times. In our questioning of the facts, the confusion and the doubt of a culture lost in darkness -the light shines out of the lockdown.

The government rest upon Him -yet, we fret that God cannot be in an election that perhaps for some didn't go a particular way.

As though God Himself isn't in control. HE IS, and how we respond to that doctrinal truth is what creates stability and trust (seen in Joseph and Mary) or insecurity and doubt (as seen in the likes of Herod).

You see, He (Jesus) is the wonderful councilor, mighty God, everlasting Father -Prince of Peace! Boy oh boy, this Christmas season, don't we need peace, wisdom, comfort, and the trust that is found in the arms of a loving father.

In our struggles, isolation, loneliness - and all of these things are real and legitimate. Far more people than we would

care to admit are in a really bad way this Christmas season.

Yet, in all of the things which seemed to have been taken away, where is the Prince of Peace moving? How can you encourage and be encouraged? I've struggled as well a great deal through much of these things.

But God, in His goodness, has kept me in very good company! The staff here, the Elders, all of you and your constant prayers, friends, and most especially my wife and family -all have been praying and encouraging.

The promise of Isaiah here- the increase of His government and of peace (vs. 7) is being carried on the feet of this little boy, back home to Israel.

This is no pulling on heart strings in the hopes of eliciting an emotional response. However, if you can read this story, so full of promise and pregnant with hope in a world gone bad, and feel nothing in all of these promises, boy I just don't know.

This kingdom, unlike the tyrant Herod and all others like him, will be different. It is different.

In the heart and mind of this Jesus, coming up the Sinai peninsular with His

mom and dad is justice and righteousness -the heart of a true king, The King. The heart of a King David beats in His chest, the mind of a King Solomon is active here.

One who will execute justice tempered with mercy, and give grace and truth in a way that speaks of the eternal love of God.

The journey has been tough. Joseph struggled with what Mary told him. Mary trusted Joseph, and together they stepped into a life of shame and exile, all in order to be obedient to God.

These two parents were the example for Jesus. Oh sure, He was God, but He was also their child. He saw how they loved each other, and trusted God.

Jesus watched His dad make decisions based upon the dreams he had, and the trust of his heavenly Father. Even as strange and risky as those decisions were, he trusted. Jesus saw that, and learned from that.

He saw too, how His mother was treated, perhaps even by the well in Nazareth. How she was shunned and ostracized, and yet how she pondered in her heart the things and ways of God.

How she trusted Him in it all regardless. Jesus learned compassion there for the outcast, the downtrodden and social misfits.

It wouldn't be from the city of David that the Messiah would be called from. Born there, yes, the littlest of all places. But it would be from the dark land of the gentiles, the northern exile region from which God's deliverer would come.

This Christmas season, I think we need to not miss this. God isn't looking for perfect people, in fact quite the opposite. It is to the broken, the downtrodden, the lonely and rejected he comes.

R.T. France talks about the comment Nathaniel made, and he says this:

"If Nathaniel, a native of Cana only a few miles from Nazareth, reacted like that, what must have been the response in Judea, where most people had probably never heard of Nazareth."

-NICNT Pg. 94

So, this was no term of endearment, but rather one of deep insult, slander and mocking. Name-calling and derogatory remarks -that fits with all of the

suffering servant passages in the Psalms and Isaiah.

It fits with Moses and Gideon -the new Moses, out of weakness and obscurity will save the world and all of humanity who will come to Him.

Not in worldly power, but in humility and meekness. It is no wonder that His coming was announced to the dirty, social outcast and misfits. The Shepherds, out in the fields, quite possibly the very fields King David watched sheep as a kid:

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

-Luke 2:8-12 ESV

It only makes sense that this is how God would come to us. If this be the case, then there is nothing this Christmas

season and beyond that He cannot
accomplish and help us with.

Come to Jesus, God in a manger, the
savior...