

Sermon Reading: 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, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Sermon Theme: The Father Faithfully Fulfills His Plans

We live in a culture that likes to plan. We plan for vacations weeks, months, even years down the road. Students will start plans for college already in middle school. We plan how we will use our money, where we will spend it and what we will spend it on. Maybe you meal-plan so you know what to buy at the grocery store and what you will eat the coming week. We plan our months, our weeks, and our daily-schedule. With the New Year, maybe you have made plans for how you will change your life in 2020 with resolutions and a different focus. Even if you fail to plan, as they say, you plan to fail.

But, for all our planning, we also know nothing is set-in-stone. Sometimes when the plans fall through it’s not too bad and we learn to power through it. But then it happens again. And another time. And it gets really tiring, really quick. Or one of those big plans fall through—life isn’t the way you thought it would be— after all the homework you did, the time set aside, but it’s just not going to work out! That’s hard. It’s frustrating. It’s easy to question. We are quick to doubt because it can seem like life doesn’t make sense.

When Joseph was making his life plans I hardly doubt this is what he had in mind. But here is a man of God who trusts. When he finds out that his fiancé is pregnant with someone else’s child, he trusts God’s messenger and stays with Mary to take care of her and the baby. When they have to travel to Bethlehem to register for those taxes, Joseph is right there doing what he is supposed to do. Even if that meant taking a difficult and

trying journey for a pregnant Mary, he trusts God's plans. When no one of their extended family—which we can pretty safely presume some were living there in Bethlehem—welcomes them into their homes to help with the pregnancy, he finds a manger where Mary can place the newly-born Christ child. When holding that newborn baby, I'm sure Joseph had thoughts like most new dads, "Now what am I supposed to do? Can I take care of this? How can I support this family?" Joseph knows full well this baby is not his biological son. Jesus did not come from him. Yet, Joseph cares for him, loves him and raises him as his own starting there in Bethlehem. No, I don't think Joseph's plans included any of this. But he trusts God.

But then when they—the Magi who came to worship the newborn King Jesus—leave, things take a turn for the worse. An angel appears to Joseph again, **“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). “The king wants to kill the child. It is up to you, Joseph to protect him and his mother.”

How easily Joseph could have ignored the warning. It was quite absurd. At the same time, how quickly Joseph could have thought, “Why doesn't God the Father dispatch an army of angels to protect Jesus? Why does it always have to be me? Now we are going to be on the run for our lives from the king! What are we supposed to do? We were just getting settled; life was going well. We were starting to get our lives in order again. Mary was starting to make some friends. I was getting good work. It doesn't make sense!” And even when they leave, the news of what Herod did had to have spread. What senseless violence. Herod orders the murder of every male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding of area. Who's in control around here!?! None of it makes sense!

When we hear different stories, we might wonder the same thing. My father-in-law told me about a shooting in Milwaukee because one woman was upset that another woman had her nails done the same way. Her plans for having unique nails didn't work out! But she missed the other woman and ended up shooting a three year old child instead. Senseless. Before we get too high and mighty about how much better small-town living is, read the Valentine paper and the senseless violence right in our back yard.

But it's not just the senseless violence that leaves us with questions. It's the senseless cancer diagnosis to the seemingly perfectly healthy person. It's the senseless sickness that just won't leave the family. It's the senseless actions of our loves ones and friends when they hurt themselves and others. “They should have known better! They did know better! Why?” It doesn't make sense someone you care about asks for help, you spell it out for them what they should do, but...they...don't...listen. It's hard to make sense of it when you make the plans, you did the homework, you were doing everything right but

everything falls through. Disappointment rages, frustrations abound, and you're left with trying to answer, "Why?"

Oh, we know. We know God is in control. But sometimes that rings like empty words in our ears. It can sound like a made up story or something we just tell the kids at night to get them to fall asleep. Quite simply, just knowing is not believing. And when all the evidence is pointing against it, when things just aren't making sense, it's hard to trust that God has a plan. It's especially hard when God's plan for your life seems to be going against what you have planned. Trusting God above all things includes when things don't make sense. And, yet, sinfully we lean on our own understanding, what we can see, what makes sense to us, and doubt God.

Rest assured, no one is pulling a fast one on God or sneaking anything past him. We see that in Matthew. The Father knows Herod's plan. The Father knows what he needs to do to protect his Son. He sends the angels to warn the Magi to take a different route. He sends an angel to get Joseph moving to Egypt. He sends another angel while Joseph and his family are in Egypt to let them know it was safe to come home. Then the Father warns Joseph another time so that they move to Nazareth in Galilee.

But it's all according to God's plan! In the midst of all this chaos, verse 15 says these things happen to, **"fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."** In the Old Testament, after over 400 years in slavery, God calls out his sons, the people of Israel, out of Egypt to bring them to their promised home of Canaan. But the people would be unfaithful to him. They did not trust his promises. They put their faith and trust in other things not following God's desire and plan for them. And so the people would be taken away to live in foreign countries as if they were in slavery again in Egypt. But God promises through the prophet, quoted here in Matthew, he would call his people back to the promised land of Israel. That promise would be partially fulfilled when God brings the people back to the Promised Land again. But those people were not God's perfect children. This promise was pointing ahead to God's greater plan fulfilled in his perfect Son.

So when the time had fully God sends his one and only Son, born of a woman, so that he would be every bit human like you and me. Look how dependent Jesus is on his earthly father. He's just like any other 1.5-2 year old child who needs to be carted around by mom and dad. He needs Joseph's protection and care from the evils of this world. So God works using this man Joseph to take his Son to Egypt. This time prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus: out of Egypt God calls his Son. Now, God's perfect Son Jesus returns to the Promised Land to complete God's plan for him.

The devil thinks he can stop God's plans. Herod thinks that he can get rid of this King. What they did not realize was that God was using them to fulfill his greater plan for you

and me. The Father could not and would not let anything get in the way of that plan. But what is that plan? Jesus came here not just to be born, but to live under God's Law in your place. For us who struggle to trust and more often doubt, Jesus is born. For us who lean on our own understanding and question God's will and plan, Jesus lives perfectly under God's expectations and demands. Because God loved the world, he gives his Son Jesus.

But why? We were slaves to sin, drawn to it, with every desire to go against God's plans and desires. We were slaves to death because that is the result of being a slave to sin. We were slaves to the devil under his control and power. So when the time had fully come Jesus is born to redeem you. That means he comes to buy you back and set you free. The price was hefty. No one else could pay it. But Jesus does. The price is Jesus' blood that he sheds on the cross. And with his death and rising from the grave, Jesus pays the entire debt of sin. Jesus tells you, "Sin no longer controls you and your life. With his head crushed the devil does not make you do anything. When I rose from the dead, I destroyed its power over you. I paid the entire bill that your sins rang up. Now, my Father calls you out of slavery to be his son and his daughter."

And that's what God makes you in Baptism—his own child. Your sins were washed away and you were promised they will neither control you nor be held against you. You are God's child. That means your inheritance is forgiveness and you are already an heir of life eternal. You are free because this was God's plan for you. And he who is faithful would not let anything get in the way of his plan.

In this world where much does not make sense and plans often don't go the way we want, that same Father continues to assure you. From the fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, the Father encourages you he still has a plan for you and nothing is out of his control. When we struggle to trust and often doubt, God works through the Lord's Supper to reassure and strengthen you. There you taste and see God's great plan to save was accomplished with Jesus' body and blood shed for your forgiveness. When the chaotic waves of this world threaten to overtake you, God assures you he is still working all things for your good. Often our lives and faith lives are threatened, but God, your Father will always faithfully fulfill his plans for your good. Amen.