

1.3.2021 Second Sunday After Christmas (Matthew 2:19-23)

In 1876, the chief engineer of Britain's post office stated, "The Americans have need of the telephone, but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys." In 1903, the president of Michigan Savings Bank told Henry Ford's lawyer, "The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is only a novelty - a fad." And in 1977, the founder of Digital Equipment Corporation claimed, "There is no reason for anyone to have a computer in his home."

We're now three days into the new year, and as usual, there's no shortage of predictions for what 2021 has in store for us. I've heard people talk about solar storms, and even a zombie apocalypse, but I'm confident most of the predictions we hear will be about as accurate as what the co-founder of 20th Century Fox said, back in 1946, about the future of television. He predicted, "Television won't be able to hold onto any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."

Clearly, we aren't very good at predicting the future, but as I look back on the past year, and those years that have gone before, there's one thing I know we can all say about the future with complete confidence. The prophet Jeremiah said it this way, "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Our lives changed in 2020, but God did not, because "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). Our Lord and our God, who dwells in us and we in Him, declares, "*I am the LORD, I do not change*" (Malachi 3:6), and therefore, in this often chaotic, ever-changing world, we find rest in the blessed assurance that the things that happen around us, can't change the Truth that lives in us.

The things that happen around us, can't change the Truth that lives in us. This is a message presented throughout Holy Scripture, and it's the message clearly presented in our Gospel reading this morning. The passage we read today is part of a larger narrative in which Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child are rushing from Bethlehem to Egypt, and from Egypt to a city called Nazareth. In this narrative we see the Holy Family facing difficult challenges, life-threatening trials, and many significant changes to their way of life, and when you read these verses you can't help but be reminded of our current

situation; the difficult challenges, the life-threatening trials, and the many significant changes that have been made to our way of life.

So, this Gospel presents the historical account of Herod the Great, the king of Judea, who, after realizing that the Wise Men aren't coming back to tell him where to find the Christ child, becomes enraged and orders the execution of all male children two years old and younger who live near Bethlehem. When Herod's order is given, Scripture tells us that the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, *"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"* (Matthew 2:13). At the angel's word, Joseph got up, took Jesus and Mary, and left that night for Egypt (Matthew 2:14).

We don't know how long the Holy family stayed in Egypt, but the verses we read this morning tell us that *"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he arose, and took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there: and being warned of God in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth"* (Matthew 2:19-23).

When you read these verses, and picture Joseph and Mary rushing from Bethlehem to Egypt, and from Egypt to Nazareth in order to protect our Lord from an evil, murderous king, there's a sense in which the great danger and the many unexpected changes they're forced to confront parallels all that we've faced over the past year. The Holy family was moving from place to place in order to distance themselves from a deadly plague named Herod, and we've been doing everything we can to distance ourselves from a deadly virus. No analogy is perfect, but this comparison helps us recognize, through Joseph's example in these verses, how we should be responding to the life-threatening trial we've been forced to confront and the many significant changes that this global pandemic has brought to our lives.

The example Joseph continually sets for us here, the way he shows us to respond to such hardship, is with faithfulness. At every turn, he confronted difficult, sudden change with humble obedience. Each time God sent Joseph a message, telling him to *Arise*, in the middle of the night, and take Mary and

the Christ child to Egypt, Israel, or Nazareth, he simply did what God told him to do. He didn't object or ask for an explanation, he just packed up everything and immediately and faithfully responded.

His example also reminds us of the New Testament lesson from last Sunday, the way Peter, Andrew, James and John all responded to our Lord when He called them to be *fishers of men*. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to this life of hard work, filled with difficulty and great personal risk, "*They immediately left their nets and followed Him*" (Matthew 4:20), and when He called James and John to give all that they are and all that they have in loving service to Him, "*immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him*" (Matthew 4:22).

In this Christmas season, as we consider examples of immediate faithfulness, our thoughts also naturally turn to Mary. Talk about life-threatening trials and sudden changes to a person's life! When the angel Gabriel said to her, "*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee*" (Luke 1:28), he outlined a plan for Mary's life, a plan that would *pierce* her soul (Luke 2:35), yet she responded immediately and faithfully, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*" (Luke 1:38).

What we see in these examples are people who confront difficult life changes by immediately being faithful to God. None of us can predict what 2021 will bring, but we know that when we respond to unforeseen, difficult changes with immediate faithfulness to God, we are literally, step by step, block by block, building our lives on Him. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of a wise man who built his house upon a rock, "*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock*" (Matthew 7:25). May God give us grace to build our lives on that Rock, which is Christ, to the end that when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon us, we will not fall, but instead we'll find peace and rest in the blessed assurance that the things that happen around us, can't change the Truth that lives in us.