

Run for Your Life!

Matthew 2:13-23

Please pray with me: Holy One, we have come this far by faith, to the first Sunday of this new year. We are here with the story of the Incarnation fresh in our minds, sprinkled with stardust, surrounded with music and all the while, with eyes wide-open to the new year ahead of us...wondering still...waiting for good news. Bless us with unswerving hope, unwavering faith and many more chances to share love with one another. Help us to keep these holy days of Christmas fresh in our minds as each new day dawns. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

How would you finish this sentence, “Little did I know a year ago, that I would be...”

Hold on to that thought as we savor Christmas:

...An angel came to Mary one day, and spoke: “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. ³¹ Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” And she did not fear as she replied, “Let it be with me just as you have said.”

...when Joseph learns that Mary is going to have a child, Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, plans to dismiss her quietly. But an angel appears to him in a dream and says, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Joseph and Mary place their trust in God.

When the time drew near for the baby’s birth, people were ordered to travel to Bethlehem to be registered in the census. It was a long trip for a woman who was due to have a baby. They didn’t ask for an “extension” until after the baby was born. They simply did what was required of them.

⁶While they were there, the time came for Mary to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Did it occur to you that many details of the birth were NOT recorded? Authors and songwriters take the story from there...

When Jesus took his first breath, what did they say...how did they react? Amy Grant beautifully envisioned Mary’s words: “Breath of heaven, hold me together...be forever near me...lighten my darkness...pour over me your holiness...you are holy...Breath of heaven.’

Michael Card imagined Joseph breaking out into song, “Little did I know...” (Michael Card’s “Joseph’s Song”) How could it be... this baby in my arms sleeping now, so peacefully...

“The Son of God,” the angel said... how could it be?

Father, show me where I fit into this plan of yours. How can a man be father to the Son of God? ...for all my life I've been a simple carpenter.

How can I raise a king? How can I raise a king? How could it be...

Mary and Joseph were not able to sit back enjoy some bonding time with their newborn son...they would have company.

...there were shepherds in the field that night as they were *every night*. And an angel appeared to **them!** “Don’t be afraid, I bring you good news...your Savior is born!” And suddenly there were more angels singing “Glory to God in the highest...and peace on earth...” Some of the shepherds must have had to stay with the sheep...some found Mary and Joseph and the child Jesus in the stable...and they ran to tell the news.

Little did Joseph and Mary know that night that trouble was brewing. King Herod got word of the birth. Wise Men from the East had consulted with him concerning the birth of the child. It may have taken over a year for the Wise men’s journey, following the star...Mary and Joseph and Jesus were no longer in the stable.

I know...every manger scene that we have ever set up...includes the Wise Men... but, Scripture says, “they entered the house and found the child and his mother...and bowed down and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” The wise men were warned in a dream to return home by another road.

After Herod discovered that the wise men had tricked him and were not returning to give him directions to the newborn king’s birthplace, he was furious! Since he could not be absolutely sure *which* baby boy was “the one” who was to be king, he ordered that all male children in and around Bethlehem who were two-years old or under... be killed. These babies have been called the “Holy Innocents.”

With this, Matthew’s account continues. (Matthew 2:13-14) as written in The Message, by Eugene Peterson:

“¹³God’s angel showed up again in Joseph’s dream and commanded, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child and wants to kill him.” ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod’s death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what the prophet Hosea had said: “I called my son out of Egypt.”

Maria Von Trapp, whose family was fleeing from the Nazis, describes it this way: “The clatter of donkeys’ hooves on the cobblestones of Bethlehem... wouldn’t it wake someone up? That is why they hurried...every sound aroused their fear...traveling slowly, hearing the shrieks....close to Herod’s power. The child Jesus was saved by this tedious flight... We feel it now as a great privilege to have been refugees once, too, to know what this anxiety truly means.”

Joseph and Mary ran for their lives and the life of their son. They could have gone to Egypt and not have been heard of again...but, they were entrusted with the life of the little baby who would change the world as they knew it.

- Mary didn’t run when she heard that she was going to have a baby.
- Joseph didn’t run when he learned what was to be.

- Mary and Joseph didn't run when the innkeeper said there was no room.
- It was a good thing that Joseph took Mary and Jesus and ran from King Herod when he did.

Details about their life in Egypt are not known, but the scripture tells us in Matthew 2: 19-23...that they returned:

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.

²³There, he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.' God's plan was unfolding.

So now, I ask you this: Can you compare anything in your life to this flight to Egypt? What fears have caused you to change direction? Has anyone ever heard from an angel in a dream? Never rule that out.

We cannot know now what God's plan for each of us is in 2023, but we can ask for God's help as in the coming days and listen for the ways in which God will speak to us to discern what changes we are able to make and when it is best to take courage and run.

Here is the challenge: run for your life *into* this new year:

In happy moments, run and praise God. In difficult moments, run and seek God.
In quiet moments, run and worship God. In painful moments, run and trust God.
and every moment, run and thank God.

Thanks be to God for knowing this new year very well already...

And thanks be to God for what we do know...little as it is. Amen