

“Random Journeys and Unplanned Pregnancies”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

1st SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

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The gospel lesson for today is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 2, verses 13 through 23. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, 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.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “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.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But 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.

There 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.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Lord bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. May our ears hear and our hearts believe as we pursue you knowing that our journeys are not random. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

This isn’t the kind of passage we want to hear after the tinsel of Christmas and the bright lights, but it does bring the reality of life right to our doorstep. What I noticed in this passage were all the geographical moves of Jesus’ family. First, they head to Egypt after the birth of Christ. Joseph has a dream that says he needs to take his family out into the world. So they pack up, and off they go. Meanwhile, Herod is exposed as the wicked ruler he is and works to do all he can to oppose God’s plan. The murders of 20 to 30 male babies under the age of two have taken place in Bethlehem of Judea, but Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are long gone.

Then, when Herod dies, Joseph has another dream and an angel of the Lord appears to him and says, “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.” So off they go again. But after being warned in another dream and finding that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there—so he went to a town called Nazareth in Galilee and took up residence there.

Wow, that’s a lot of moving around. Three times in the passage we become quite aware that God is leading and steering them on a particular course. If we were reading about *just anyone*, we might think their travels **were** random, but then we think, no—this is the Son of God we’re talking about—no way are his travels random. Now we might be so tempted to think *our own journeys* are random. After all, we make our own choices, and we have particular leadings because of a job or a geographical location we’d like to live in.

God is working out God's purposes. We make our choices, we journey here and there, and God works for good and fulfills his purpose. Things that are so challenging and go wrong in our lives have this way of resulting in much good. So in the midst of the suffering—good things result. We look back over the last year and wonder, “Where was God in some of those awfully challenging moments?” But then we need to think again—God is here.

Through all our difficult and challenging moments, God is working out his purposes as we make our choices. Our journeys aren't random, for God leads his children and directs their paths. We run into opposition because the choices we make aren't always what they should be. But God's purposes for us are never smothered. We go through trials and suffer, but our direction is sure as we turn to God for help and call on his name.

A few weeks ago I was talking to a young mother when I was out and about. She started talking about her unplanned pregnancy this last year. I listened to all she had to say. How it brought financial challenges, time challenges, but in the end she said she wouldn't have it any other way. She lost some of her so called friends because it was an unplanned pregnancy, but she didn't care. She realized they weren't really friends anyway. We said good-bye, and I wished her a Merry Christmas.

When I got home I started praying. Within a few minutes I realized something. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus had an unplanned pregnancy in their lives too. They packed up, left their families, and lived through what they thought were random moves in their lives. Some of their friends probably found out Mary had gotten pregnant out of wedlock, but God used it mightily. The unplanned pregnancy, as the world may have viewed it, blessed the world. Many of the things we have to deal with feel so terrible, and yet, we look back, and we can see God worked good despite the circumstances that

surrounded it. Let's bless the Lord today and thank him for his presence in our lives.

Let's pray. Dear God, who has our times in his hands, encourage us this day to know you have been with us and will continue to be with us and bless our lives. Despite the challenges and trials we go through, our journeys are not random for you are working out your purposes in our lives. Our direction is sure because you walk with us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.