

**Text: Matthew 2:13-23**

**Theme: Going Home By Another Way**

**Date: January 7, 2007 (Epiphany)**

In the Name of Jesus, God's Anointed One, Dear Christian Friends,

Life doesn't always go the way we plan. I'm sure Mary and Joseph must have felt the same way. They didn't plan to make a trip to Bethlehem just before the Baby Jesus was born. They certainly didn't plan to have their baby in the stables. They probably didn't plan on staying in Bethlehem as long as they did. And they certainly didn't anticipate Herod wanting to take their child's life, or to be forced to flee like hunted fugitives to Egypt. It would seem that when God's Son entered into the world, God didn't give him any special privileges. Jesus faced the same bumps and bruises that happen to ordinary people like you and me.

When unexpected things like this happen to us, we are tempted to think one of two things, both of which are equally false. Either we think that we have a God in heaven who wants to do something to make life a little easier but isn't ABLE. Or we think that we have a God in heaven who CAN do something to make life a little easier but doesn't CARE. Neither is true. God is able and God does care. But sometimes, as it was with Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus in our text, God chooses work his grace plan so that he brings us safely home by another way. That's the thought we want to take home from God's Word today. **GOING HOME BY ANOTHER WAY.** God wants us to 1) know his plans for the Christ Child and 2) trust God's plans for all his children.

### 1. Know God's plans for the Christ Child

King Herod, who ruled when Jesus was born, was a great politician but an awful man. He was responsible for fabricating many roads and constructing many fine buildings in Israel. The nation of Israel prospered under his rule. Herod completely remodeled and refurbished the temple so that he might gain popularity with the Jews and secure his position as their ruler.

But morally, Herod was evil. Herod was miserably jealous of anyone who might threatened his throne. He kept his throne secure by murdering his wife and brothers. When the Magi came from the East and asked where they would find the "King of the Jews," Herod's jealous ear immediately perked up. "King of the Jews? Tell me when you find him so I too can worship him," was Herod's lie. Herod once again displayed his evil nature when the Magi followed the instructions of the Lord and return to their country by another route. Herod then ordered that all boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under be killed. It's easy to see how evil Herod was.

But it's just as easy to see who was behind this evil displayed in the person of Herod. Satan was behind this evil plan to destroy God's plans for the Christ Child. The Book of Revelation (12:4) describes Satan's evil intent toward the Son of the living God, *"The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. {s} she gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter and her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. {6} the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God."* It was Satan's plan to destroy the Christ Child and to ruin God's plan of Salvation. There's nothing Satan wouldn't do to one of God's children, especially God's own Son, to destroy God's plans for saving the world from sin and death in hell.

But we also know how God's gracious plan unfolded in history to save the Christ Child. It was God's plan-foretold by Isaiah the prophet--that Jesus would be worshipped by Gentiles that is non-Jews. This was no coincidence that Gentile Kings from the East came to worship Jesus as Savior. Jesus came to be the Savior of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. It was also God's plan--foretold by the prophets--that Jesus would be called out of Egypt and a Nazarene. Satan wanted so desperately to destroy God's plan, but God wouldn't let him have his way.

As we look at the events in the early life of the Christ Child, we might ask, *"Couldn't God have given his Son Jesus a little smoother going? Couldn't God have just stopped the devil and stopped King Herod from their evil plans?"* Yes God could have done this for his Son. But remember God's plan didn't just have his Son Jesus in mind. But his perfect plan of salvation has all his sons and daughters of this sinful world in mind. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of that when he writes: *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil. {15} and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. {16} for surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. {17} for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a*

*merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.* God did not send his Son into the world to avoid suffering and hardship, but to endure it for our sakes.

That's why you and I are interested in the story of this holy family, specifically, the Christ Child. It's important for us to know that Satan and Herod did not succeed. And that this family made it home safely by another way because this Child had a life to live and a plan to fulfill. A plan that would take him to the cross for you and for me. He had sin to overcome and death to conquer in order for God's plan to be fulfilled, not only for this Child, but for you and for me.

## **2. Trust God's plan for all his children**

Because God's plan has always included you and me he want us to trust his plan for our lives. It has always been God's plan to bring his children home by another way. You know there are two ways a person can get to heaven. One way to get to heaven is to live a perfect life. When the rich young man who thought he was really good came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to have eternal life, what did Jesus say? *"If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."* Jesus was not telling a lie. You can get to heaven if you keep the Ten Commandments.

The problem with this way of getting to heaven is that you can't just keep some of the commandments most of the time. Or even most of the commandments some of the time. You have to keep all of the commandments all of the time to earn heaven. The Bible says, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* That's why in the story of the rich young man Jesus went on to prove to him that he hadn't kept all of the commandments. In fact, he hadn't even kept the First Commandment because he loved riches more than God.

Jesus could prove the same thing with you and me when he reminds us that his law requires perfect love for God and our neighbor. Do our offerings today show perfect selfless love for God or do they reveal a heart of greed, a heart that doubts God's ability to meet all our needs? Did our use of our Bible this past week show love for God or were we too busy to read his Word? Did all our words and thoughts this past week show love for our neighbor or build up our family members? Or did those words and thoughts reveal our vengeful and evil hearts? Jesus could go on and on as he points out our many sins. Let's not deceive ourselves. As sinful people we don't even begin to keep some of the commandments some of the time.

But God knew that. And that's why he has given us another way home. Jesus said to his disciples, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."* God has given us another way home. Jesus is the way. Only Jesus could pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. Only his righteousness could become our righteousness. God accepts us into heaven, not because we kept some of the commandments some of the time. But because Jesus kept all of the commandments all of the time for us. Jesus perfectly gave gifts to his heavenly Father without a greedy or doubting heart. Jesus daily studied the Word of God with perfect devotion in our place. Jesus completely forgives the wrongs of his enemies in our place. Jesus did it all for us. When one way to heaven was completely destroyed by our sin God gave us another way to heaven in his Son Jesus.

If God has given us a perfect way into heaven through his Son Jesus, then why doesn't he just take us to heaven right now? After all, the way that Jesus prepared for us is ready and waiting? Why must we labor and endure hardship in this sinful world? Why doesn't God just take his believers to heaven right now?

Just as Jesus had a purpose to fulfill in his life as God's Son, so we have a purpose to fulfill in our lives as his children. God's purpose for us is what the message of Epiphany is all about. The word Epiphany means to reveal or make known. When the Magi came from the East and worshipped the Christ Child, God revealed the Savior of the world to them. Jesus came to be the Savior of all people. God's purpose for our life is to share the Savior of the world with as many people as possible. That's why God hasn't taken us to heaven already. He has work for us to do. He wants us to tell others that there is another way, besides perfect obedience to the Ten Commandments, to get to heaven. It's God's Way through his Son Jesus. Who in your life right now is trying to get to heaven by the way of obeying the Commandments? Is it a family member? A co-worker? A friend? A neighbor? It doesn't matter who it is, Jesus is their Savior. Jesus is the only way to heaven for all people, Jews or Gentiles alike.

Just as Satan used Herod and others in trying to destroy God's perfectly plan of saving the world through his Son Jesus, Satan's evil purposes are still the same today. But just as God's grace and power led Mary and Joseph to take their Son home to Nazareth by another way, so by his grace and power will he lead us home to heaven by another way. Jesus is the Way. Thanks be to God, our life doesn't go the way we plan. Thanks be to God, we are going home by another way, his Way. Amen