

12-30-2007, 1 Christmas A
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

God is in Control
Matthew 2:13-24

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas. Christmas Eve was certainly wonderful. What glorious music we had. I want to thank Janie and Trevor Williams, Mary Grace Bayer and Ben Edquist, David Hill, Will Hearn, Glenda and Janet, and Brian Casey and the brass ensemble, which was composed completely of musicians from this church. I also want to thank Shannon and Dan Dalstra for the really fun skit at the 6 p.m. service.

Christmas Eve was a mountaintop experience. We celebrated the presence of Christ, God with us.

Now, of course, you know that Christmas isn't over. There are twelve days in the Christmas season. We should still be celebrating Christmas. In fact, we should be celebrating Christ coming to us every day.

However, the poinsettias only last so long. You can only unwrap the gifts once. (Although my brothers and I did rewrap our gifts one year, so that we could unwrap them again. It wasn't the same.) Soon the Christmas decorations will come down. The past few days have been about throwing away wrapping paper, cleaning up dishes, balancing checkbooks, making exchanges and going on diets.

But those things are nothing compared to the downside of Christmas that Mary and Joseph experienced. Soon after the birth of Christ, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to warn him to take his wife and his baby son and run for their lives. King Herod had learned from the Wise Men that a child had been born in Bethlehem who was to become King of the Jews.

If there was one thing King Herod was not about to allow, it was for someone who was a threat to his throne to live. Herod had been king of Judah for over 40 years by the time Christ was born. He was 24 when he was appointed governor of Judah by the Romans. He proved to be such an able ruler that a few years later the Romans allowed him to call himself King of Judah. He was called Herod the Great. In many ways he was a great king. Under his reign Judah lived in peace, which was no small accomplishment, considering how much the Jews resented Roman rule. There was always an undercurrent of a rebellious spirit among the Jews. But Herod kept it under control. Judah prospered under his rule. He built great cities. He built a new Temple and expanded the Temple mount, which was a wonder to behold. He built aqueducts and roads.

In some ways Herod was even a kind king. In those years when the people struggled economically, he would lower the taxes. One year when there was a severe famine, he actually bought food for the people with his own money.

Herod had one problem: He really liked being king. He liked it so much that he would do anything to keep his throne. I mean anything. He actually killed his own mother and three of his own sons, including his oldest, because he decided they were plotting to take his throne. Anyone who became too powerful or successful was in danger of being executed by Herod.

Herod was 68 years old when he received word that a baby had been born in Bethlehem who would someday be king of the Jews. His health had already begun failing. He knew he didn't have too many years left to live. He would actually die two years later. You would think he wouldn't be concerned about a baby who couldn't possibly take the throne for at least another twenty years.

But Herod wasn't taking any chances. Just in case the child might become a threat to him while he was still around, he decided to eliminate him. So, he ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem to be killed. He figured the death of a couple of dozen children was a small price to pay for his peace of mind.

Herod may have been a powerful man. But he was no match for God. God was not about to allow Herod to take the life of the Baby Jesus. Herod may have thought he was in control, but he wasn't. God is the ultimate authority. God is in control. God had sent His Son into the world to win the salvation of the world. God was not about to allow anything to happen to him until the right time.

God knew how to stop Herod. All it took to thwart Herod's plans was a single dream. God sent an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream. It was no great, earthshaking event. Mary, sleeping by his side, was not even aware that anything was happening. However, God overcame the plans of the most powerful person of that region and changed the course of human history that night through a simple dream.

That's the way God works. No one can overcome God's plans and purposes. God gives us the freedom to make our choices and our decisions. We may think we are in control. However, God knows exactly how to change the course of the events of our lives with a single touch.

Oftentimes we are not even aware of what God has done when it actually happens. It's only when we look back and see how a single small event changed the course of our lives that we see the hand of God guiding us.

Becky and I celebrated our 37th anniversary the day after Christmas. The fact that we ever met is something of a miracle. We met at the Wesley Foundation at Stephen F. Austin State University. She was a student, and I was a court reporter. The miracle is that she wasn't even supposed to go to Stephen F. Austin. Her father went to Sam Houston State University. As she was growing up, everyone assumed that she would also go to Sam Houston State. However, she wanted to room with her best friend from high school. Becky tried to talk her into going to Sam Houston State with her. But her friend had a grandmother who lived in Huntsville. She knew that if she went to Sam Houston State, her parents would insist that she live with her grandmother. So, she decided to go to SFA. And Becky also decided to go to SFA.

So, I met the girl who was to become my wife because her best friend's grandmother lived in Huntsville. I have no idea how it came to be that her grandmother lived in Huntsville. She couldn't possibly have known when she moved there that she would be changing the lives of two people who never even met her, as well as their children and grandchildren. Whatever caused her to live in Huntsville, I see the hand of God in it.

The point is that God is in control. Whatever our plans are, God is the one who is in control. God can turn our lives in a totally different direction than we had ever dreamed of as easily as we move a finger. And God can do it so unobtrusively that we have no idea what was happening.

God is in control. If we trust God, we can look back at our lives without regret. We can look forward without fear. We can put our lives in God's hands and trust that God is guiding us in accordance with God's plans and purposes for our lives.

We believe that God is guiding us away from the Herods. That doesn't mean there won't be any crosses. However, we believe that when the crosses come, they come by the plans and purposes of God, and that if God leads us to a cross, God will lead us to the resurrection.

As we enter into this New Year, let us remember that God is in control. So, we are not afraid of whatever may come our way. We are God's children, and God is watching over us, just as surely as God watched over the Baby Jesus.

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