

Post-Christmas Blues

Christmas is over! The tree is still up, but it looks mighty empty underneath. All that's left of the turkey is a bare skeleton. Visiting family members have left to go back home. The excitement of Christmas took weeks to build to a crescendo and then it's over.

Life has gone back to normal and many people suffer from the post-Christmas blues; a kind of depression after all the hoop-la of Christmas...

Think of what it was like for Mary and Joseph. We spend weeks before Christmas preaching about the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus. We seldom hear a sermon about what happened to them after Christmas.

Some people don't consider Joseph to be a very important character in the Christmas story. The Bible doesn't record anything that Joseph ever said. He is usually ignored. The emphasis is always on Jesus, Mary, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men. This morning, Joseph is the central character.

Matthew 2:13 (KJV)

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

The Wise Men visited Mary and Joseph and presented them with their three gifts. When they leave, Mary and Joseph go to bed, and Joseph has a dream. Now this isn't the first dream that Joseph has. While an angel appeared to Mary and told her of her forthcoming pregnancy, God always spoke to Joseph in a dream. Joseph was probably a lot older than Mary. Maybe, like a lot of us, he took a lot of naps!

Anyway... the angel tells Joseph in the dream to flee to Egypt, because Herod is going to try to kill Jesus. There are several things I want us to see here.

1. Joseph's Obedience

Matthew 2:14 (KJV)

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

Joseph didn't waste any time. He didn't wait until morning... **he got them packed that night and headed out to Egypt.**

Think about what this meant for Joseph. He and Mary had traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, expecting to stay only for a few days and then return. **They hadn't planned on moving!** Their family was back in Nazareth; they hadn't even said "Good-by." They didn't bring a wagon loaded with their furniture, valuables, and furnishings. Joseph probably had a carpenter shop back in Nazareth; what would happen to that?

In the middle of the night, God said "Move!" Joseph didn't argue with God. He didn't ask God for "Plan B." **He didn't wait to try to figure it all out; he just obeyed.** I think that's why God chose Joseph to be the step-father of Jesus. God knew his heart; Joseph was sensitive to God's will.

2. God's Provision

Matthew 2:11 (KJV)

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

When God calls, He provides. God wouldn't have told Mary and Joseph to go to Egypt, and then say, "You're on your own, Good luck!" They would need enough money to live off of while down in Egypt and God provided it for them through the Wise Men.

3. Herod's Anger

Matthew 2:13 (KJV)

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

Matthew 2:16 (KJV)

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

Talk about "Post-Christmas Blues!" This isn't usually included in plays about the Christmas story. We leave this part out. Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus running for their lives, fleeing the country. Dead babies left behind. It's not part of our holiday picture, is it?

Let's take a little closer look at Herod. He was a mean, vicious person. History has a lot to say about him. Caesar Augustus was quoted as saying that it would be better to be King Herod's pig than his son. Pigs were protected by law; Herod's family wasn't. King Herod had already killed 2 of his own sons; he had them strangled. He also killed one of his 10 wives, his favorite wife, because he thought that she had been unfaithful to him (she wasn't!). He killed his 18-year-old brother-in-law, because the Jews liked him better than they liked Herod. He also killed her grand-father, and her 80-year-old uncle, who had once saved Herod's life. He also killed his own uncle and his mother-in-law. What's a few babies in Bethlehem to King Herod!

4. God's Plan

Matthew 2:15 (KJV)

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

It had been God's plan all along (Hosea 11:1) for Jesus to come out of Egypt just like His children did 1500 years before, under Moses. Mary and Joseph wouldn't be alone in Egypt. By this time, Egypt was also under Roman rule, but Herod didn't have any power there. There were already thousands of Jews who had fled there to find safety from the wicked King Herod. There were Jewish settlements there with synagogues and a Temple. **The land that had once enslaved the Jews, God used to protect the Jews.**

Matthew 2:19 (KJV)

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Joseph has another dream and the angel speaks to him once again...

Matthew 2:20 (KJV)

20 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.

Mary and Joseph were probably on their way back to Nazareth, by way of Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:21 (KJV)

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

No questions, no arguing, no problem. It's time to go back home.

God had protected them, and now they could return to Israel. God didn't want His Son, Jesus, to be brought up in Egypt. God had delivered them from Egypt 1500 years before, and He didn't want His Son raised in that heathen environment.

Matthew 2:22 (KJV)

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

Another dream! Joseph had heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, was on the throne, and Archelaus was worse than his father! There was a riot in Jerusalem, and Archelaus stopped it by killing everybody in the crowd. He went into the Temple one Passover, and executed 3,000 Jews. Finally, Rome had enough, and banished him to what is now France, where he died.

Matthew 2:23 (KJV)

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Mary and Joseph, when they got to Judea, where Archelaus ruled, were afraid to stay in that area very long. So, being warned by God in a dream, they headed North, as fast as they could, to Nazareth in Galilee.

This also fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament (Isaiah 11:1, 53:2-3). Nazareth was a small town. It was famous for not being famous. No one had ever heard of Nazareth. It isn't even mentioned in the Old Testament at all. Not far from Nazareth, the major highways running North/South and East/West crossed there. It was so insignificant, that in John 1:46, Nathanael said "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

There's something special about insignificant little towns, isn't there? That's where God wanted His Son raised. You should feel blessed that God has put you here. That's what He did for His Son.

God wanted His Son to be raised in a place outside of politics, outside of prosperity, and outside of notoriety. He wanted His Son to be raised in a simple village, without fame or prestige. There were a lot of Gentiles in that area, and God wanted Jesus to be raised in that environment.

What can we learn from all of this?

1. The safest place to be, is where God leads you.

The Wise Men followed a star, and it led them to the Christ-child. The Wise Men followed God's instructions in a dream, and they escaped Herod's wrath.

Joseph followed the Angel's instructions in a dream, and escaped to Egypt. Joseph followed God's instruction in a dream, and escaped the wrath of Archelaus.

The safest place you can be, is in the center of God's will. Whatever path you take in life, God knows where it will lead. How much better to follow the path that He leads you down.

2. A Christian isn't exempt from troubles.

Look at all the suffering and trouble that the 1st Christmas brought about: The Wise Men, avoiding the wrath of Herod, Mary and Joseph fleeing for their life, multitudes of innocent babies killed by a mad King.

This was just a baby, God's baby boy. Why didn't God just get rid of King Herod? That would have solved the whole problem.

Why doesn't God just get rid of the Devil? Answer: He will. After all, it was Satan who was behind all this evil, just like he's behind all the evil in the world today. Look at what happened to King Herod; he died like the dog he was. Look at what happened to Archelaus; he died in exile. God will win out in the end. In the meantime, He always gives us the strength to win every battle, when we follow the path He sets before us.

3. God is in charge.

You can always feel safe when you are living in God's will. That's not to say that bad things won't happen to you, but God is in charge. Everything that happened in the Christmas story was planned out by God. You can see His hand in the Christmas story every step of the way. God is in charge.

Joseph and Mary experienced "Post-Christmas Blues." They didn't have their baby in Bethlehem, then "live happily ever after." Their dreams of going back to Nazareth to live a quiet and peaceable life, were postponed for a few years. Their life was nothing like they had planned, or expected.

Maybe you are experiencing “Post-Christmas Blues.” Maybe your Christmas wasn’t all that you expected. Now that Christmas is over, maybe the excitement has passed and your balloon has popped.

Guess what? God is still in charge! He didn’t leave Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem to do it alone. He didn’t leave them in Egypt to tuff it out. God is still on the Throne, God is still in charge!