

Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

(19) When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

"Now What?"

Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

Here we are..., a New Year..., 2021 (Praise the Lord). Probably for most of us, Christmas and New Years was unlike any other.

Time spent with friends, with family, out shopping, holiday dinners and gatherings, even "church" was very different.

And in many ways, "Christmas and New Years" just didn't seem like "Christmas or New Years!" And now here we are, the holiday season just about over. The gifts have been opened, the food has been stored. All the wrapping paper and empty boxes have found their way into trash bags. The cork is back in the bottle..., And even the house is back to order (well maybe!). So, "Now what?"

What's Next?

I wonder if Mary and Joseph felt a bit like we do? Their world was certainly "very different" on that 1st Christmas..., forced to travel while Mary was about to deliver. No room for them in a town swelling with people.

Angels singing, smelly animals in the delivery room. Shepherds visiting without an invitation..., and then sometime much, much later.., the visit of the Magi from the east bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 2

You can just about imagine this young couple asking..., “Now What...., What’s Next?”

And for this family on that 1st Christmas..., “things didn’t really change for the better just because the “big ball in Bethlehem Square dropped.” Mary and Joseph didn’t live a peaceful and quiet life in Bethlehem for very long. Things couldn’t be peaceful and quiet, because the baby they were raising was the very Son of God, the Savior of the world.

- And satan would try everything in his power to thwart the plans of God and bring to an end the “life and the hope of all humankind.” And so Mary and Joseph would have to be placed into a kind of, “God’s witness protection program” for a little while...,

Eventually, they would move back to their small hometown up north, after things settled down. But for now, there was no time for Mary and Joseph to get comfortable in Bethlehem..., their world was about to become “unraveled again!”

And sometimes..., “you and I can get to feeling like that...”
unraveled a bit.. - “Now What?”

Church..., it’s all too easy for us to find ourselves asking that question, “Now What... What else can go wrong?” (especially after living through 2020)....

But what I want you to hear today is the “Good News” that “God meets us in our Now What..., that God is always smack dab in the middle of our “Now What.”

And that’s what I want you to see in this story of “Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus fleeing for their safety.” God is right in the middle of their “Now What...,” helping them through, bringing his guidance and direction and presence into the middle of their “unraveled life!” Truly, bringing them hope!

And God works this same way in “our” lives too... And we should recognize that it sometimes takes “time” for God to bring all the pieces together..., and life can sometimes get kind of bumpy as God works us into this plan of his..., and we may not always like how we “get to where God is wanting to bring us.”

But I'm certain.., God has our best interest at heart, and our world's best interest at heart (just as he did with Mary and Joseph). And we see this in their story.... It was the middle of the night, and Joseph was sleeping, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

The wise men from the east had just visited Jesus. They had told King Herod that they were on their way to visit the one who was born King of the Jews, and this greatly upset Herod. "He" was the King of the Jews, or so he thought. And he must of even became more upset when the Wise Men didn't return to him as he thought they would...

- Any threat to his position of power had to be eliminated. And so very soon, maybe even the next day, Herod would send his soldiers into Bethlehem to massacre all the little boys under the age of two.

"Get up, Joseph," the angel said.
"Get out of here as fast as you possibly can."

The powers of darkness was leading Herod to do the "unthinkable!" This would be the second attempt to destroy God's plan.., God's only Son!

- Of course the 1st attempt was while Jesus was still in Mary's womb.... The powers of darkness played havoc with Joseph's mind and heart.., until the angel of the Lord came to him in a dream and settled that "Now What" question he struggled with.... (and Joseph then took Mary into his home as his wife).
- And so now, with this 2nd message from an angel.., Joseph gets up in the middle of the night, and he and Jesus and Mary make their way to Egypt, where they stayed until the death of Herod.

Do you see the three things that happen here (3 things that occur in the "Now What"?)

- (1) God is in the middle of this "Now What – life unraveling situation."
- (2) Satan loses, and
- (3) God's Word...., a prophecy is fulfilled.....,

- *And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1)*

When the prophet Hosea wrote this, he was referring to the nation of Israel, God's Son, being called out of the slavery of Egypt into the promise land....,

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..., But here, the Holy Spirit teaches us in Matthew that this also applies to Jesus – just as God called the nation of Israel out of Egypt, so also God called his son Jesus out of Egypt.

Now what? Joseph, Jesus, and Mary are living with a group of Jews in Egypt, but not for very long. Herod dies, and an angel of the Lord appears in a dream to Joseph again, and tells him that it's safe for him to go back to the land of Israel.

- So Joseph, Jesus and Mary return to Israel, but something is wrong – Herod's son, Ark-a-lay-us was in charge now, and he was just as bad as his father. Now what?

Once again, Joseph is warned in a dream to leave the area. He moves north, to the town of Nazareth in Galilee, and that's where he stayed.

Do you again, see the three things that happen in the “Now What”? Once again,

1. God meets Joseph and Mary in their “Now What – life's unraveling” situation! And again,
2. Satan loses - the Messiah is safe, and
3. God's Word – again, a prophecy is fulfilled.

- *“And so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”*

The prophets of the Old Testament never wrote this prophecy down, but it was understood that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene, a despised person from a small town in the middle of nowhere.

Listen, Satan went right to work through this whole time that led up to Jesus' birth, and then he worked overtime once Jesus was born! But his plans didn't work.

- Because God met Mary and Joseph in their “Now What” and God's plans are greater! Satan loses, and God's Word, God's prophecies are fulfilled.

And you know, in the midst of God's plans for us...., God is greater than any power of darkness in our world.... Listen, the power of evil, Satan, the devil (whatever you want to call it) is still at work today (we've seen this way too much...., be it a germ released from a lab, terrorism, war, prejudice, injustice, greed and stupidity).

- And especially right after Christmas..., it seems like this “power of darkness” just goes into overtime..., working extra hard, especially on Christians...., wanting you and I to not only put our decorations away, but to put our joy away, and our faith away. 5

“You can stop being religious now,” the devil says. “You can stop being joyful now. Christmas is over.” It’s time to get back to the regular things of life.”

The power of evil attacks us with these thoughts, and unfortunately, we sometimes listen. We become kind of downhearted..., the birth of Jesus Christ fades into the past.

- It’s kind of like our desire to worship goes down with the lights, and our joy disappears with the wrapping paper.

.... Maybe our joy and desire disappear because we have bought into the world’s thinking, more than we realize. Perhaps we believe the equation: that happiness = material things, more than we think.

And you know, if lasting happiness could be found in having material things.., and in being able to indulge ourselves in whatever we wanted.., then most of us in America should be “delirious with joy,” and “happy beyond description, all the time.”

But instead, we find high rates of suicide, depression, child abuse, and other personal and social problems beyond description, especially during the holidays.

- We find people, and sometimes ourselves, struggling to stay joyful, because deep down inside we have been let down by the lies of the world - that happiness is found “having all we want and being able to get more.”

But it doesn’t have to be that way. Because the Word of God for today, teaches us three things:

- (1) God always meets us in the middle of our “Now What...,” especially when the powers of darkness seem to be overtaking us...
- (2) Satan loses, always..., satan loses and
- (3) God’s Word..., God’s prophecies, his promises are fulfilled....., and we see this throughout Jesus’ life....

..., all the way up to the cross and the open tomb..., God’s prophecies fulfilled, and even beyond, as God offers us his everlasting life.. for ever and ever with Him!

And so, “Now What?” How do I respond to the grace of God? How do I say thank you? How do I glorify the God who has done all this for me? 6

For Joseph..., he responded by listening and following closely what God spoke to him through the angel. He wasn't one of those..., “I'll-do-my-own-thing-kind-of-guy.”

- He listened, and he obeyed. That's how he responded to the grace of God. That's how he glorified the God who had sent the Savior into his very own family.

You and I can do the same thing. Today, God reveals himself to us, in ways much better than our dreams..., he reveals himself through his written Word. We can listen, and follow his way!

Like Joseph and Mary, we can be “people who do not rely completely on ourselves..., but who listen closely to the Word of God, and follow it.”

Know and trust..., God will always be present in your “Now What.” And throughout our lives, satan will continue to lose, and God will continue to keep all the promises he has made to us – this pattern will never change.

May God bless you with a joy and love for him, that lasts long after the Christmas and New Year season is over. Amen