

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

Matthew 2:13-23

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
December 28-29, 2019

Has the “glow” of Christmas already begun to fade?

Hopefully you had a wonderful family Christmas! The Spirit of God chased away the ghosts of Christmas past through the sure love of God and the peace of his forgiveness born in a stable!

But, is it possible that the “glow” of Christmas is already fading and the darkness of this world is settling back over you? Politics can be enough to do it if we wade into the mess without the Word of God at hand. Maybe you have had some personal news or news about a friend that has darkened your world. I know that is true for some of us! A diagnosis. A pink slip. “Merry Christmas!”

Did Christmas really fade, or is Satan working overtime trying to overwhelm us with the sights and sounds and realities of this world under the curse of sin that we might lose sight of what we know to be true?

The account of the Escape to Egypt is always a bit sobering coming so quickly on the heels of the Wise Men. But that begs the question: what DOES the Spirit of God want us to SEE here for our blessing since he placed it here for us to read? Do YOU see what I see? Is there a silver lining in this account to let us know that even in the darkness we have a merciful and powerful Savior?

1. WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

You know, you and I love to talk about the gospel, the good news! The gospel is the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the entire world and that by believing in him heaven is God's gift. Free! Forever with God! Thank you, Jesus!

But have you ever scratched your head as you heard about evil in the world or experienced personal hardship in your own life and wondered, “Is Jesus only good for when you die? Where is the good news for everyday life?!”

I'd like to think the Wise Men weren't thinking that as they kicked their camels into high gear in the dark of night to put miles between themselves and King Herod. “Why are we running if the infant is their King?”

Did Joseph question the power of God as he loaded his wife and stepson onto a donkey and got out of town in the dark of night? “This child is the Son of God, the angel said, and yet we flee back to Egypt in reverse of the Exodus with Moses! Where is the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day to keep King Herod at bay?”

Child psychologists would question the psychological and emotional and physical stress on a young child swept away in the dark of night! Sensing the rapid heartbeat in the chest of his

mother. Sleeping fitfully in the cool of the night and on the back of donkey up and down the rolling hills. “This child is the good news of God’s King?! If that is true, where is the good news for HIM in this world? And where is the good news for those attached to his Name?”

APPLICATION You know that the world sometimes scratches its head in consternation as it looks at us, confused as to why our lives aren’t more obviously blessed than theirs. “I don’t get it! What is the benefit to being a Christian?! If your God is real and powerful, why does he not take better care of you?”

And as our culture decays around us morally and spiritually, we may sense that the days of running from evil as Christians could soon be back upon us! To stand for intimacy and marriage according to God’s plan, to stand for the value of life from conception to last breath, to stand for honesty and integrity in all situations can turn the sights of evil upon us. That is exactly why Abel died at the hands of his brother, Cain! Evil hates what is right.

But why should we have to run if Christ is the King?! Why should we have to fear if Christ is OUR King?! Where is the good news in everyday life?

2. WHERE IS THE GOOD NEWS AS GOD “CHECKS” HIS BOXES?

For many of us raised in the Christian faith and weaned on the words of God, we find some comfort in the hardships of life as we see God dutifully checking the boxes of his prophecies. “See, God said there would be wars and rumors of wars, and earthquakes and famines in various places as we near the end. God is faithful!” There is comfort in seeing that God is accurate and right and in control—so with the Escape to Egypt.

“My son must come again out of Egypt.” CHECK!

“Rachel must cry again in Ramah, weeping for her children because they are no more just as she wept when the Babylonians swept into Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and slaughtered the Jews held captive at Ramah.” CHECK!

“Team Jesus still on the defensive after the death of Herod the Great. Fear of his son, Archelaus. Afraid to stay in the city of David, the rightful earthly home of the Messiah King. Off to Nazareth so that he will be called a Nazarene.” CHECK!

There IS good news as God checks his boxes, verifying for us his plan, his control, his salvation. The mind of God!

But don’t think for a minute that God’s heart does not cry out with ours even as his plan weaves the fruits of evil and the scheming of mankind, bending them to conform to his will and to accomplish in the end his blessings! It is something theologians call “concursum”—the plans of mankind “coursing together” with the ultimate will of God.

Innocent babies died to fulfill Jeremiah’s prophecy! 15-20 children scholars estimate based on proposed population counts in Bethlehem. But no. Jeremiah simply spoke of what evil would do in hatred of God and how God would simply weave it into his plan to save.

APPLICATION “But it was only 15-20. It could have been worse. Evil happens.”

I always need to caution myself about complacency when I hear about evil. Sometimes when we hear it on the news and it doesn't really impact me, well, we can lack empathy.

“Another person shot in Milwaukee last night? Wow, those people need to address their problems.”

“A person shot in the Town of Norway this week? Wow! That's getting a bit close to home!”

“Praying for another member diagnosed with cancer? Well you know, that happens. But I'm young.”

“Opioid epidemic ravaging the suburbs with overdose deaths? That's sad, but at least my family is shielded. We're Christians.”

But what happens when out of the blue, in the black of night, soldiers of evil invade your home and your child is among those 15-20 innocents of Bethlehem? That mystery king born as witnessed by your friend, the shepherd, as told to him by angels, has kindled the wrath of a petty and petulant king and “now my baby is dead?! Where is the power of this King? Where is the good news as God checks off his boxes?”

3. WHERE IS GOD WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

Where is God when you really need him? Dear friends, it is the heart of God that holds the KEY to comprehending evil in this world that we see and know. Jesus wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. He cares! “As I live, declares the LORD God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” He cares! God's heart hurts for his people; God's heart hurts for his world! So where is the good news? Where IS God when you need him?

Our God tells us that he and his love for us are found in the details—and not just in checking boxes of prophecy, but in himself stepping in and owning our hurt—all of it. And how did he do it? By sending his Son! “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” The writer to the Hebrews helps us mightily in our struggle when he tells us in his second chapter, verse 17: “For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human 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.”

Jesus was fully human—like us in every way except for sin. SO human that he gets us and our struggles and our hurts and our heartaches and our pain because he himself experienced them. How many months old was he when he ran from King Herod as though Herod was God and Jesus was not?! How aware was Jesus as the God/man? Did Jesus get a pass on experiencing the stomach flu, gastrointestinal issues, kidney stones, because he was God? What does the writer say? “Fully human in every way.” Might Jesus' best friend have died getting kicked in the head by a bull? How did his stepfather, Joseph, die? Was it pretty—if death can be pretty? Or was Joseph's last breath hard to hear? “Fully human in every way.”

And Jesus' death wasn't easy. Even saying that seems so disrespectful! His death was something we will never know! His death was physical torture as bad as it can get. But more

than that, his death was hell—something we can't begin to comprehend! The Father turned his face away from his *innocent* Son!

Where was God when Jesus needed him? Just as with us, God was in the details saving us, where we always need him to be. Whether running from Herod or sleeping in the cold or growing up in humility without the life of a prince, or being spit on, flogged, pinned to a cross, and shut out from the presence of his Father, Jesus was in all those details for you and me! That is why we observe the Feast of the Holy Innocents of Bethlehem, to be reminded that our God is aware of every evil, and that he is in the details to know our sufferings, to remember to have mercy on us in our struggles, and to show us the way safely home to heaven when his Father ticks the last box that our struggles should end!

CONCLUSION My own father's death was hard. I was there in his hospital room in the last days and the last hours as he struggled to breathe. A man who taught me to love my Jesus and to trust in him even in the dark days. And so we prayed to our God that he would be present still in the details of my father's life.

In the midst of it all, in a lucid moment, my father rose a bit in his bed and said clear as the angel's call, "We have a beautiful Savior!" And in time, my Father ticked the last box, "Richard Strobel safely home"--this world cursed by sin, but defeated by the man who fled as infant, in the arms of his mother, on the back of a donkey—only to return to Israel that he might die our death that we might live his life and that he might be our merciful Savior! Amen.

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