

Matthew 2:1-23

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And **having been warned in a dream** not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

¹³Now after they had left, **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream** and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’

¹⁹When Herod died, **an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph** in Egypt and said, ²⁰‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after **being warned in a dream**, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’

It’s 2017...and what changes we have seen just in our life time! For example, when I was going through school in the 60’s I knew one or two students who studied abroad. It’s a very different world today; before my daughter, Mariah, graduated from Goucher College, a semester study abroad became a requirement for graduation. Our

world has shrunk; we can now connect in real time to virtually any place on our planet.

And yet in the story of the wise men traveling from the East, I believe Matthew was proclaiming that the news of Jesus’ birth had reached across the whole known world. Clearly, the course of salvation history does not require the internet. This was also Matthew’s way of telling us that Jesus came not just for the salvation of the people of Israel, but for *everyone*.

Matthew’s account also has a dark side; he described Herod as a brutal, power obsessed ruler; slaughtering children in an attempt to eliminate competition for his throne. Sadly, Columbine and Sandy Hook remind us that the world can still be a savage place; the slaughter of children is not just ancient history.

So in a sense we are not strangers to the world into which Jesus was born. It is as if Matthew has written Jesus’ birth story for us, now in 2017, with our world so mired in war and violence. Matthew’s story is timeless because he is revealing to us the timelessness of God’s work to lead us – in every age – into salvation, in spite of great evil in the world. In Jesus, the man from Nazareth, we see God in the flesh, guiding the course of salvation history for us all.

Yes, in the midst of war, terror, oppression, and brutality, Matthew proclaimed *for all time* the coming of a savior, and showed us how God, in Jesus, was guiding salvation history in spite of a world that had no room for him; a world that didn’t want him; a world that sought his death, and ultimately succeeded.

Yet, out of this darkness, we must remember how Matthew continued his revelation of God in Christ. The course of salvation history was not cut off with Jesus’ death; Jesus was raised, and he bestowed the power of life born of God’s love upon the people. And we must remember how Matthew ended his gospel; Jesus appeared to his followers and commanded them to go and make disciples of all nations. And then he promised them that he would always be with them, even to the end of the age.

Yes, the world has changed in so many ways, yet at least this remains; the steadfast love of God, who continues to guide us in the light of truth and in the way of salvation. The same God who guided Joseph every step of the way, guides us still today.

In Matthew's account the wise men were guided by a star that acted like a GPS beacon; they followed. They also discerned God's voice in their dreams; they obeyed. Joseph too, was obedient to the angel voices that guided him to keep the babe safe.

Our UCC slogan is: *God is still speaking*. So...**how** is God still speaking? How do we hear the voice of God today? Do angels still bring us God's messages? And what kind of messages does God convey? Are we warned in our dreams like Joseph? Does God send us affirmations, or calls to action? Does God reprimand us, or just send us blessings? Do we ever hear God say, 'you are forgiven, and I love you?'

When someone comes to mind and we wonder how they are doing, could that be God asking us to give them a call to check in on them? In last Tuesday's Faith Formation Group a couple people shared how they have been strangely impelled to do something. They couldn't explain it, but it was a clear message they just had to follow, and it turned out to be a good thing they did.

God led me to ministry through a phone call, and then through affirmations and love. I couldn't resist! Yes, I believe God can use the phone. God can use the internet, or any means, modern or ancient to guide us in the way of salvation. God is still speaking!

And God is still speaking at this table. We gather at this table remembering Jesus. We remember that Jesus came as one who served, and gave himself on our behalf. This table invites us to become a communion of saints, a communion of servers, to become one body, sisters and brothers together, so that all may know the grace of God and the salvation that makes us whole.

At this table we realize that we are all the same; we are all God's children. Yes there are differences, but that is what makes the human

race beautiful. We all long to be loved and cared for. This is the table of love and care. There is a place for everyone at this table.

So as we come to this table, let us consider how God has led us here today. Every day we plant our feet on this earth we have a purpose and a reason for being. God loves us and calls us to live that love; 2017 depends on it. Lord, Jesus, have mercy! Amen.