

## Change of Plans

Matthew 2:13-23

January 1, 2023

Being a parent—the beauty and sheer terror of it all.

The *beauty* of something so small, so new, that miraculously fills you with love. The mystery of new life. The tenderness that wells up inside of you as you feel the tiny breath of this miracle. A baby so small and so tightly wrapped, that as it leans into you and coos, you melt.

The beauty and wonder of having a newborn—there is nothing like it, until you consider...

The *terror* of it all. Newborns are so small, so dependent, so yours *forever!* They are tiny and precious and so small that we can hardly take it in. And, immediately, we add up the cost of what it is going to take to send this child to college. How will I ever do that?

And so, I think, we focus on what we can control. The nursery. We obsess over colors and furniture. We research car seats and strollers. We stock up on tiny clothes, diapers, and read books with titles such as this: *One year to an organized life with baby. How to have the happiest baby on the block.* Or the infamous *What to expect when you are expecting.* These line our bookshelves and our minds. We are prepared for this new thing, or so we lull ourselves into thinking so.

Now let's for a moment imagine Mary and Joseph with their first child. The beauty of it all: the wonder that Mary and Joseph knew as they held the tiny fingers and toes of their small baby boy. The smell of his sweet head nuzzled against their breast.

And the terror of it all: Herod was alive and seeking to harm every baby boy. Not to mention the weight of responsibility that comes with being a new parent.

The questions—is this baby eating enough? Will it ever sleep? And, on top of that, this is not any child. This is the Child of God.

I imagine that Mary and Joseph longed to get sleep as all new parents and grandparents do, but Joseph was not any parent. Every time he went to sleep, he dreams, and an angel appears announcing, "Change of plans."

To summarize the "change of plans" that Joseph receives:

The first change of plans. An angel tells Joseph, "Get up and take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there unto I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

Second change of plans. After being in Egypt and living there for a while, making friends, getting their own rhythms established as a family, a home if you will, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Get up and go to the land of Israel!"

The third change of plans. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Get up and take Mary to the District of Galilee, to the town of Nazareth."

In their short marriage, short life together, such turmoil, so many abrupt "change of plans." They had barely settled into their new home in Egypt, and they were told, "change of plans."

Our homes are our safe place; they are our haven from the outside world. Our homes are places that we long for. But Joseph and Mary, they have no such luxury. The change and the uncertainty that they have faced.

In all this I cannot help but wonder *what is sustaining Joseph?* In the mixed emotions of fatigue, relief, and excitement, he must have been feeling that the angel didn't see that he was at the brink. But as the angel speaks the new reality, the change of plans, *Joseph listens*. He does not speak a word.

Joseph is attentive and obedient. He listens, and he acts. Which means he takes Mary and Jesus, and they go. God's saving grace can be seen through Joseph's obedience, for *Joseph listens*.

Second, *Joseph trusts*. As Joseph and Mary nurture and care in ordinary ways for their extraordinary baby Jesus, *God with us*, their trust strengthens and grows. Joseph listens, and Joseph trusts. Joseph knows that deep within, God is watching over them. God is guiding their way... in spite of the change of plans.

Perhaps you know this reality of a change of plans. You have had the unexpected loss of a spouse—of your person—and the emptiness inside threatens to destroy you. Or your career has been turned upside down due to no fault of your own, and you struggle to find the meaning and purpose to go to work each day. Or the retirement that you planned for is not what you thought it would be. The money is gone. Or your spouse's health has deteriorated. You have discovered that having children is not possible for you, or you grieve the decisions that your children are making. Friends, if we are honest, the reality is "change of plans" is the norm, for each one of us here.

So, I ask you, what is sustaining you? What sustains us?

First, we *listen* to God as Joseph listened. And I know that listening is hard work. We want to speak, to object, to say we have all the answers. But what if we listened? What if we were obedient and we really listened?

Second, what will sustain us is if we dare to *trust* God. As we do what God invites us to do, our trust will strengthen and grow.

And last, what if we paid attention to the *presence* of God in our lives, and little by little, our confidence in

God began to grow? Our confidence that God was watching over us and guiding us—that would begin to grow and strengthen.

Today is a new year, and I have good news. I have seen these things grow in the past year in and among us. I have seen you listen. To people you don't agree with. To God. To yourselves. And to one another.

I have seen you trust against all odds. Trust God's promises. Trust that there is enough to share of your gifts, your time, and yourself with one another, with our neighbors, with our city, and with our world.

And I have seen you grow in the confidence that God is watching over you, that God is watching over us and guiding us even in the most difficult of times.

I think that we long to know that deep within, God is a God who will guide us and protect us. In our scripture reading this morning (Isaiah 63:7-9), Isaiah says:

*I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,  
The praiseworthy acts of the Lord.  
Because of all that the Lord has done for us,  
And the great favor to the house of Israel  
That he has shown them according to his mercy,  
According to the abundance of his steadfast love.  
God became their savior  
In all their distress.*

*It was no messenger or angel*

***But God's presence that saved them.***

Friends, is there any greater promise than this as we enter into 2023? It was God's presence that saved the people. And with the arrival of the baby Jesus, we have that same promise. It is God's very presence, Immanuel, that saves us. For God is present with us.

We do not know what the new year holds, but we know that if we act as Joseph acted, if we listen in prayer, if we trust, and if we watch for God's presence in our lives, we can and will live with the confidence and purpose that God is watching over us and guiding us. Let us be that people.

To God Be the Glory. Amen.