

“There’s Always A Way”
Matthew 2

12/26/09

9 & 10:45 am

Series, “*Be Amazed!*”

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we find ourselves in very difficult circumstances. We’re into something way over our heads, something we’ve never faced before, and we can’t see the way ahead or the way out.

We need wisdom beyond our own resources, sometimes protection, sometimes provision of some kind.

This morning we’re going to see how God comes through for Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

What I love about this story is seeing the character of Joseph under incredible pressure: his sacrifice, his willingness to listen to God and follow His direction, his devotion to Mary and to Jesus.

And we see that Joseph isn’t in this alone. God is constantly providing the wisdom and direction he needs to be the responsible, protective, leader, husband and father he is called to be.

Let’s dive right in. We’re going to see a powerful and inspiring story as well as some great applications for our own lives.

OPEN to Matthew 2 (**PAGE** 1497)

READ Matthew 2:1-15

I. Herod: Who was he?

There were several “Herods” in this family of rulers; three of whom appear in the New Testament. The one mentioned here is Herod the Great, also called King Herod. The one who ruled when Jesus was an adult was one of his sons; and Archelaus, the one who reigned when Jesus, Mary and Joseph returned from Egypt was a third son. Herod was not a Jew, so not the rightful King of Israel. He was appointed by the Romans, who had conquered Israel and most of the known world at that time.

Herod was a cruel and scheming man who permitted no one to interfere with his rule or prevent the satisfaction of his evil desires.

He was ruthless murderer. He had his own wife and her two brothers killed because he suspected them of treason. He also killed some of his own children. He was married at least nine times in order to fulfill his lusts and strengthen his political ties.

“It is no surprise that Herod tried to kill Jesus, for he alone wanted to bear the title ‘King of the Jews.’” (Wiersbe)

According to Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote of this period of time, Herod died at 69 years old of a very painful disease ... shortly after he murdered all boys two years and under in Bethlehem.

II. The Magi: Who were they? (QUICKLY)

Magi were the most highly educated people of their day. They served as scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, doctors and legal authorities. They were advisors to whichever king they served.

Those who were classified as scientists practiced sorcery, astronomy, astrology, wizardry, interpreting dreams, and other forms of fortune-telling

According to v. 2, they were “**from the east;**” likely modern day Iraq or Iran.

They were probably exposed to Jewish Scriptures and thought through the many, many Jews who lived in the same areas as they did.

We do not know how many actually came to worship Jesus. Since three gifts are mentioned, it has been commonly assumed there were three.

Also, they did not come on the night of Jesus’ birth, but later. We know this because we read in v. 11 that they came to the “**house**” where Jesus was; not the “**stable.**” Also, Jesus is called a “**child,**” not a “**baby.**” They likely came somewhere between a few months and almost two years after Jesus was born. They brought expensive gifts and presented them to the baby-king as part of their worship:

Gold, the most precious metal then known, (KING)

“**Incense**” or *frankincense*, an expensive fragrance. The Jews used it for worship in their Temple. (PRIEST)

Myrrh, also an expensive fragrance. It was used in incense, a perfume for clothing and as a stimulant. It was also used by the Jews in preparing bodies for burial. (SACRIFICE)

What I find most amazing about their coming to worship Jesus is how God reveals Himself to all people everywhere, whether Jew or Persian, highly educated or not, garden-variety sinner or cultic practitioner.

He reveals Himself and His Son to each one.

III. Joseph: God's agent of protection

Joseph is an amazing man. His heart is clearly set on following the Lord. He responds to unimaginable circumstances by simply listening to God and following His directions. And from all appearances, He does it willingly, eagerly, and with a whole heart.

Here's the succession of four events where we see Joseph accepting the role of the protector of Mary and Jesus:

Matthew 1:18-25: In response to God's message to him through an angel, Joseph protects his pregnant fiancé by taking her as his wife.

According to Old Testament law, if he had gone to the town elders and brought charges against Mary for infidelity, she may have been executed.

But, he lays aside whatever painful and angry thoughts or feelings of betrayal he likely has, and takes Mary home to protect her and provide for her because the Lord revealed the truth of the situation and told him to take Mary as his wife without any fear. He responds immediately upon knowing God's will.

Matthew 2:13-15a: Again, God speaks to Joseph in a dream, telling him that King Herod is going to seek out Jesus in order to kill Him.

Joseph responds immediately and leaves Bethlehem under the cover of darkness, following God's direction to find hiding and refuge in Egypt.

The Egyptian border was approximately 80 miles from Bethlehem. If Joseph followed the main roads, it was about 140 miles of travel ... approximately 7 days. About 100 miles further into Egypt, there was a large Jewish community in Alexandria that numbered about one million Jews.

And, it appears God financed this relocation through the gifts the Magi brought.

"Where God calls, God provides."

READ Matthew 2:19-21: An angel brings God's message to Joseph for a third time. He tells him that Herod has died, and to take Jesus and Mary back to Israel. Again, he responds immediately.

He does so, and it appears that he has in mind to return to Bethlehem. He and Mary are from Nazareth, and it seems they would return there. I think Joseph may be wanting to protect Mary and Jesus from the town's thoughts and talk about Mary being pregnant before she and Joseph were married. This would also protect Jesus from the stigma that would be attached to Him as well.

But, when Joseph hears that King Herod's son, Archelaus, has become king, he is afraid, concerned that it won't be safe.

And now we see the fourth time God speaks to Joseph in a dream:

READ Matthew 2:22-23: God confirms Joseph's concerns about Archelaus in a dream, and so he takes his family back to Nazareth, a safe place away from the politics and madness of Jerusalem.

When I look at Joseph, I see a lot to admire as a husband and father (as the head of his household).

Truths to Embrace

1. God will provide **direction**

- Through His written Word
- Through the Holy Spirit
- Often (but not always) through those He has given responsibility over your life: parents, pastors, the government.

2. God will **protect you**

Often (but not always) He uses those He grants positions of responsibility over us: parents, pastors, the government.

And God Himself is the Self-declared, special Protector of widows and orphans:

Psalm 68:5 "A **father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.**"

Psalm 146:9 “**The LORD** watches over the alien and **sustains the fatherless and the widow ...**”

3. God will use you to ***protect*** those for whom He has given you responsibility

- Husbands, father:

- To hear from the Lord, stay close to Him.

Don't view time in the Word as a duty; but as connecting w/ God to listen, understand, ask questions, gain wisdom.

Stay connected with God personally, follow His ways in your daily habits, at work, at the gym, alone, etc.

- Embrace responsibility for your wife and children

- Ephesians 5: love wife sacrificially, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.

- Ephesians 6: love and nurture children, teaching them the Lord's ways through your words and your example.

I have a picture in my office of a father kneeling beside his young son's bed, the son asleep for the night, and in the background an angel holding back a dark shadow symbolizing the devil.

One of the ways you protect your family is by praying for them.

- Ephesians 5: wives respond to your husband's leadership. Your children will cue on you.

- Parents (dads and moms) with children:

With your child's education, friends, neighbors, clubs, organizations ... all activities ... you need to know what is going on first hand; through personal involvement.

You cannot assume anything anymore. Society is changing rapidly and your children are at risk more than you were.

As a parent, you must be ***proactive***: take the initiative! Be ***involved***, ***present***.

Don't wait until there's a problem! There will be things you don't know about, even when you are doing your best.

That's heavy. Yes it is.

But, remember, God is committed to guiding you, giving you wisdom through His Word, in prayer, by the Holy Spirit, through godly counsel ... you have so many resources available!

“Father in Heaven, this year I will consistently draw close to You. In all my leadership responsibilities, I will seek out Your counsel through Your Word. By Your grace, I will lead and respond to You as Joseph did for Jesus and Mary. In Jesus' name, Amen.”