

“Black Christmas”

Matthew 2:13-23

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Over the holidays, Jackie and I received a lot of beautiful Christmas cards from friends near and far. Out of all the cards we received, not one depicted the scene that revolves around our text this morning. I did not see on any card a picture of Mary and Joseph quickly leaving Bethlehem under the cover of darkness in order to protect their new baby. There is a good reason.

Today’s text focuses upon the ugly side of Christmas. We really don’t like to think about this, do we? We would rather focus our attention upon the angels singing and shepherds visiting the holy family in the quiet and peaceful manger. We even delight in the Wise Men traveling a great distance to bring gifts to this special child. It is what happens after their visit that we wish we could ignore. Marketers do; however we must not.

There is a new movie that was released Christmas Day titled, “Black Christmas.” Actually it is a remake of a 1974 movie by the same title. Roy Moore wrote the original screenplay and as the title indicates, all the action takes place around the holidays. I did not see the earlier movie and have no intention of seeing the latest edition because it is a horror movie filled with hatred, violence and murder. To be truthful, though, I must acknowledge that the original Christmas story had some of these unsavory elements, too.

It was because the ugly side of Herod the Great emerged after hearing about the birth of Jesus. His jealousy raged as he thought about a rival to his throne. His anger became uncontrollable when he realized the Wise Men were not going to return to tell him where the Christ child had been born. In response, he ordered all male babies up to two years of age be killed.

This certainly put Jesus’ life in jeopardy, so an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and said, “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” Matthew 2: 13b.

Joseph and Mary quickly complied with the messenger’s warning and made the seventy-five mile trek to Egypt. They remained there until the death of Herod and returned to Nazareth to rear this special child.

I am indebted to Edward Markquart, pastor of the Grace Lutheran Church in Seattle since 1973 for his paraphrase of the angel’s warning to Joseph. It is from his paraphrase that the message for today is unveiled on Epiphany Sunday. He writes of the angel’s warning, **“Joseph, you and your family need to head in a new direction or you are going to be hurt badly.”**

There are families here today that need to hear and heed this warning. They need to head in new directions or they are going to get hurt badly. This is especially true, but not limited to, families with young children. If you stay where you are or on the same course, you cannot escape the turmoil and pain looming ahead.

Is this a message for you today? Are you one of the families here this morning that needs to make changes in priorities, lifestyle and relationships? Are the well-being of your children and the stability of your home being threatened by irresponsible behavior or neglect?

Are you in denial? Are you listening to the messengers God has sent into your life? Are you rebelling against the warnings and advice of those that love you? Have you given up and adopted a defeatist attitude?

Is it possible to head in a new direction? Joseph and Mary did. When their child was threatened and their home was in danger, they made radical changes in their lives, and you can, too.

How can this be done? What will this require? What did it require of Mary and Joseph? They had to listen to the angel and acknowledge the threat. They had to decide that the danger

was real and must be confronted. They had to make sacrifices, going down roads never traveled. So they went to Egypt and stayed there until Herod the Great died.

Why did they do these things? They were responsible parents and faithful believers. Their love for God and this child were more important to them than their own comfort, desires or opinions. There was no sacrifice too great for them to make to protect the child entrusted to their care.

Who helped them at this critical juncture in their lives to make these sacrifices and changes? I am confident the Lord walked with them every step of the way providing the confidence, courage, strength, determination, wisdom, patience and resolve they needed. I am also confident that they found a support group in Egypt that helped them along their journey.

It was not uncommon for Jews to flee to Egypt when in danger and historians tell us that over one million Jews lived in Egypt in the first Century. They settled down and created thriving communities, even though many were temporary residents like Mary and Joseph.

Don't you suspect that Mary and Joseph found their way to one of those communities and discovered a support group that nourished and nurtured them when they needed it most? I believe they did.

I believe you can, too. There is any number of people, professional and lay-people that would walk with you along your journey if you opened your life to them. They will encourage and assist you as you assess the changes that need to be made in your family.

This church is one of those places where you would find this kind of loving support. We would welcome you with open arms and offer the encouragement you need. Will you let us help you save your family? I cannot think of a better decision you could make to begin a New Year. Let this affirming congregation be the healing and helpful presence of Christ in your lives in 2007.

“Joseph, you and your family need to head in a new direction or you are going to be hurt badly.” Is this a word for you and your family this morning?