

From Christmas to Chaos

Matthew 2:13-15

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First Christian Church

Rev. Josh deSteiguer

Wichita Falls, Texas

13 Now 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 fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

Well church family, another Christmas is in the books, and I hope it was as wonderful for each and every one of you as it was for me. I love Christmas and the season of Advent, yet, it always seems like a season with an awful lot of buildup and anticipation, busyness, and preparation for a main event which is over so quickly. It seems each year I find myself preparing for Christmas long before I feel like it, long before I catch the Christmas spirit if you will. Each year it seems I am hearing Christmas songs on the radio earlier and earlier. I've got to admit "Jingle Bells" just doesn't move me when I still have the air conditioner running at full blast in the truck. Then there is the scheduling and list making that takes place over the course of weeks, the figuring out what to get for who, and putting Christmas parties on a calendar weeks in advance. It seems like the build up to Christmas with its preparation with all of the expectancy both stressful and exciting, well, it takes forever. But then each year, never at exactly the same time, there is a moment when it hits me. When Christmas hits me with a sense of awe, of reverence, with its overwhelming peace that is ours through remembering Christ's birth. This year that moment came particularly late to me, it was directly after the 11:00 service ended. We had finished silent night, it was Christmas

morning officially, and everyone was leaving quietly. Much more quietly than on most Sundays, because let's face it we can be a rowdy group who likes to chat. The buildup the preparation was over. The parties had been attended, the last amazon package had arrived with mere hours to spare and the live animals had come and gone from Fellowship Hall without incident. Well, except for one grumpy pig that bit Claire. The youth, kids, young adults, directors and lighting expert, had performed wonderfully and pulled off the tableau at both services. Most importantly, all of the candles held by small children had made their way back into the baskets without anything catching fire. It was that moment that I found myself with nothing else to worry about, nothing else that had to get done, at that moment it was to me Christmas.

I'm sure many of you could recall similar moments or maybe it is a certain moment each year, when Christmas officially happens for you, when it becomes real. Maybe it is here at worship, or maybe at a family meal, or when all the presents are under the tree and the kids are in bed. A moment when Christmas is really here when the power of that silent and holy night can be felt in your very soul. What a wonderful moment that is! And then, oh how quickly it passes. Many of you went back to work this week, or for students and teachers you will be heading back soon. The stresses of life pop up unscathed after a brief moment of peace. Many of you turned on the news or got back on social media to see that yep, we still live in a divided nation with an uncertain future, in the midst of a chaotic, world filled with crisis and tragedy. How quickly we go from Christmas back to chaos. This year for me it started with walking past the room that will be little Asher's nursery in a very short time and realizing that we've still got work to

do. When I walked into the kitchen and dishes that were invisible on the 24th had somehow materialized in need of washing. The list of tasks, the things to do, the work and responsibility, does not stop at Christmas. When talking to my parents and hearing that Grandma is still struggling with pneumonia, I was reminded that sickness, and the frailty of our own bodies do not stop at Christmas. And when I got the news that one of our own church family had lost her beloved husband unexpectedly, I was reminded that suffering, grief, and loss don't stop at Christmas. Unfortunately the rest of life and this broken world in which we live go on as business as usual even with the birth of our Lord. And maybe that's why we find ourselves at this tragic, chaotic, and jarring passage of scripture today. This text stands in stark contrast to the rest of the advent and Christmas season. Just like in our lives leading up to Christmas so the scriptures we have read during advent have been preparing for Christmas long before the manger receives its precious guest. We have seen the drama of the angel's visit to Mary, and we know of the stress and pressure that a reluctant Joseph has placed upon him as well. Mary's beautiful and prophetic song of praise we know as the *magnificat*. The journey to Bethlehem to a stable and a manger, Angels appearing to shepherds and kings travelling from afar to offer gifts and worship the new born king. All of these things leading up to that wonderful moment that silent night when the word became flesh to dwell among us. And then we are hit with this story, and seemingly all of the peace, hope, joy, and love come crashing down into chaos as the holy family flees for their lives. At this point in the story the manger is empty, the star and angels have gone back from whence they came. The shepherds have returned to their flocks and the wise men are on the long journey home. The world

then as now does not stop for Christmas. With this text we are snapped back to the reality of Jesus' place and time. He was born into a nation run by a puppet king who would kill any threat to his power. He was born into the midst of a violent and oppressive world that would force Him to be uprooted from his ancestral home and the people of God's promise to become a refugee in the very same Egypt that had once enslaved God's people. This story proves to us that all that is wrong with the world is not made right upon the birth of Jesus. Here we see unjust and horrific suffering inflicted on those who are innocent. Here we see a worldly ruler threatened by the new kingdom which is ushered in with Jesus Christ. Here we see new parents having to make a heart wrenching and terrifying decision to do what is best for their child. Then like now the world's suffering and problem did not stop at Christmas. So where is the good news? Where is a Gospel word for God's people in the middle of this text of terror? If we look closely at the very last line of this passage I think we might get a glimpse. *"This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet "out of Egypt I have called my Son"*. It may be hard to see, but this is actually a declaration of God's faithfulness, a declaration of hope. The world did not stop at Christmas, but neither did God, even in the chaos, the suffering, the uncertainty of a world that wasn't ready to receive Jesus, God was at work. God is keeping God's promises, and even in the midst of a world that was and is pretty messed up, God was and is and will be working to draw this broken world into God's kingdom on God's timing. By snapping us back from all being calm and bright and into a world that needs saving, It also serves as a powerful reminder that God did not just send us a one-time gift of a baby in a manger, but the eternal gift of a Savior. A Savior who is the embodiment of God's never ending

reaching out to humans like us in the midst of our mess, through His life, death, and resurrection.

Maybe that's the point, Christ's birth didn't change the world, but it changed those who encountered Him and believed. For those who experienced the birth of the Savior they would never be the same. The first Christmas was not an end to the struggle, suffering, and chaos of this world. Rather it was a call to many to get involved in the work that God was doing. Mary and Joseph are called from normal everyday people to step out on faith, go where God is leading, and take their place in God's eternal plan. The shepherds were called to get involved in God's story by telling others what they had seen, what God had done for them. The wise men were called to change directions and go back differently than they came with the message that God is doing something powerful over there in Bethlehem. So the question we are left with, is how will we be changed? In response to Christ's birth how will we be different in the midst of a world that is still as broken as it was before? Will you like Mary and Joseph step out on faith into new responsibilities and service? Will you like the shepherds go and proclaim to someone else that unto us a Savior is born? Like the wise men will you offer your best gifts whatever they may be to the service of the new born king? Or have a change in path, course and direction because of the Lord you have encountered? Will you seek to extend peace in a world fraught with conflict? Will you bring a message of hope to those who have none? Will you love the unlovable? Will you respond to the trials of life with a deep and abiding joy that makes people ask about its source? I hope you will, I hope we will. Because that is how we are to live as people who have heard the angels, seen the star, and believed that unto us a child was born. The world

does not stop at Christmas, all too soon it goes back to its chaos filled business as usual. But for us, once we encounter Christ, there is no such thing as business as usual ever again. The world may not have changed at Christmas but by God's grace may it change all of us.

Amen