

Jesu Juva

“All According to Plan”

Text: Matthew 2:13-23; Galatians 4:4-7; Isaiah 63:7-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

On Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, we heard again the story we know so well - the story of Christmas; the story of the birth of the Son of God for us. St. Luke told us again of the journey to Bethlehem, the manger, the angels and shepherds (Luke 2:1-20). And St. John told us those amazing words: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:1-14).

Today, St. Matthew tells us exactly what kind of world Jesus was born into. And it's quite a different picture. A world of jealousy. A world of hate. A world of sorrow. A world of deception. A world of anger. A world of inconvenience. A world of trouble. A world of fear. Or in other words: *your* world. For are not all these things what plague you too? They are the fruits of sin. The sin that continues to make this world quite a different place than it was created and meant to be.

We could call these the fruits that hang off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that tempt us still today. Fruits that look so good and tasty and just what we need . . . but that once we sink our teeth into them, they produce nothing but evil; nothing but bitterness and strife and sadness.

You know it. Think about it. The last time you exploded in anger - *did that solve your problem? Really?* The last time you seethed in hatred - *did that make things better?* The last time you burned with jealousy - *did you get what you wanted?* The last time you stewed in resentment - *did that satisfy you?* Yet how often do we do these things? And *keep* doing them? Or have them done to us? Causing sadness, causing division, causing fear, causing so much hurt.

So Jesus. He comes and doesn't just have the really cool stuff happen to Him - the angels and shepherds and wise men. But this. *Our* this. He goes through what we go through; what *you* go through. Whatever sin has stung you, Jesus has felt it too.

That is what we hear from Matthew today. God's people have to go to Egypt to save their life. *Jesus too*. His people are brought out of Egypt by God. *Jesus too*. They can't go home right away, however. *Jesus too*. They live in the midst of their enemies. *Jesus too*. They live in the midst of sorrow and death. *Jesus too*. The first few years of life for Jesus were spent in travelling and fleeing, living in weird and unusual places, and in fear for life itself.

Merry Christmas!

Well, yes, actually! This is, in fact, what makes our Christmases merry! That God came to be with us in all this. That Jesus came to protect and rescue us from all this. From all the sin that plagues us from without, and from all the sin that plagues us from within.

As I seem to say a lot in Bible classes, God never promised you an easy life; that He would keep all trouble from you, give you all you want, and make you better off than everyone else. *Maybe* that's true for you; *probably* not! But what He has promised you is what we hear today: that whatever happens to you, He will be with you through it all. And so Christmas. Immanuel: *God with us*.

And God with us at just the right time. That's what St. Paul said. ***When the fullness of time had come***, or, at just the right time, God sent forth His Son. Now, you have to admit, hearing all that we heard from Matthew today, it sure doesn't seem like just the right time! And to think about that a little more broadly, it sure doesn't seem like the right *place* either. If location is everything (as realtors tell us today), then right in the backyard of an fearful, jealous king doesn't seem like the optimal place for this birth. But of course, it was. All of it. According to plan.

For nothing can stop what God has ordained. The beginning of Jesus' life is not trouble or worry free, but He is protected and preserved. Which should tell us something when a few years later, suddenly Jesus is not protected and preserved. When a few years later, one of His own turns on Him, He is arrested, beaten, treated as the worst kind of criminal, and then hung up to die a criminal's death on a cross - a Roman warning to the world: *do not be like this man, or this is what will happen to you*. This too then is God's will. This is the plan. Everything to fulfill God's Word. Everything to fulfill God will.

We're going to hear that a lot this year as we read through Matthew's Gospel. It is one of his themes, one of his most-used phrases: *this was to fulfill*. It is not an accident, it is not chance or fate. It is God for you. God saving you. Even if that saving doesn't happen exactly as you think it should . . .

And it's the prophet Isaiah that helps us think about that a bit. For he starts out today by saying: *Let me tell you of the steadfast love of the Lord!* And he talks about Moses and the exodus . . . and then how the people ***rebelled*** and ***grieved His Spirit***. You know the story. But let's think just a moment about *why* they rebelled and grieved Him, and if it's not the same as what we've been thinking about.

And so God brings His people out of Egypt - that's great! But in just a day or two, they find themselves trapped between the Red Sea on the one side and the Egyptian army on the other. *So, God, is this how you save us? Is this what your plan was? Really?* Then

they travel to Mount Sinai where Moses disappears for forty days. *So, God, is this how you save us? Is this what your plan was? Really?* Then they find themselves in the desert with no water and no food. *So, God, is this how you save us? Is this what your plan was? Really?* Then they get to the border of the Promised Land and discover the people already living there were really big and really strong. *So, God, is this how you save us? Is this what your plan was? Really?*

You seeing a pattern here? The people wondering about God and His plan and His ways, yet God saving His people. It's not always easy, it may not always make sense to us, but it is God in His steadfast love saving His people. His love rescuing, His love disciplining, His love providing, His love struggling. ***To make for Himself***, Isaiah says, ***a glorious name***. Not because He needs the glory, but so that all the world know His glory and know Him as their Father. As a God of love. As a God dependable and reliable and saving. A God who doesn't walk away when the going gets tough, but loves all the way to the cross.

So now, too, *your life. Not the right time? Not the right place? Not making sense to you? Lord, I really don't need this cross right now? Shhhh.*

God divided the Red Sea. Moses came back down the mountain with the Word of the Lord. God provided food and water in the desert. God defeated those big, bad people in the Promised Land. God came as a baby. God hung on the cross. God died for you. God rose from the dead for you. God gives you His Spirit. God baptized you and made you His child. God forgives you. God feeds you here with His Body and Blood. God gives you parents to protect and raise you. God gives you friends to help and care for you. God gives you your body and life and all you have. God gives you a family and a church. God is Immanuel, God with us, still.

Not exactly what you had in mind? *Maybe that's a good thing!* You think maybe we've tried our own way long enough?

So maybe it's time to try love instead of anger, confession instead of excuses, forgiveness instead of revenge, gladness instead of jealousy, service instead of selfish, prayer instead of spite. Receiving all this from Him who came to be with us in our sin, and then giving all this to those He sends to us now. For as St. Paul said, because of Jesus we are ***no longer slaves to sin, but sons of God***. Yes, God fulfilling His plan for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.