

Well, there goes Christmas 2014. The Christmas tree is still up, but there are no presents left underneath. The turkey is gone, as have the visitors. Life is not exactly back to normal but it's pretty close.

We spent weeks, if not months, planning and preparing for Christmas. We've been through Advent, we've sung the carols and we've told the story. Easter eggs will appear in the shops very soon because the world just keeps moving on - but we are not ready yet to leave the Christmas story.

Quite correctly, our thinking and teaching is focused on Jesus and we include Mary, the shepherds and wise men. Joseph is usually ignored and the Bible doesn't record anything that he ever said. In fact, after the incident in Luke 2 when they left Jesus behind in Jerusalem and later found him in the Temple, there is no mention of Joseph.

Luke sums up the next 12 years like this:

2: 39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Matthew gives us a more detailed picture though: Jesus has been born, the shepherds have been to visit and now the wise men have come with their gifts. At some point after they had gone Joseph has a dream. This isn't the first dream Joseph has had, and it's not the last either. The angel tells Joseph in the dream to flee to Egypt because Herod is going to try to kill Jesus.

I want to look at several things we can learn from this story:

Firstly, Joseph was obedient. Joseph didn't waste any time. He didn't wait until morning, but got them up in the night and headed out to Egypt and safety.

When Mary and Joseph had travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem they had only expected to stay for a few days. They hadn't planned on moving. Their family was back in Nazareth, along with the house and business. He probably hadn't brought very much money, and it is unlikely that he would have brought his carpenter's tools.

It wasn't safe to travel in the middle of the night because you couldn't really see where you were going, and because there were lots of robbers looking for easy victims. But when Joseph was told to get up and go he didn't look for plan B, he didn't wait for a better time, he simply obeyed.

Then we see God provided. They may not have brought things with them to enable a further journey to Egypt but God had not left them on their own. The wise men had brought gifts which could be used to keep them going in Egypt. You see, when God calls, he also provides.

Then we see Herod was angry. We don't usually talk about this bit in the Christmas story. Mary, Joseph and the baby running for their lives - fleeing the country.

Herod ruled as governor of Galilee from 47 to 37 BC and then he was promoted to rule as King of all Palestine. He became famous for building cities, fortresses, and temples throughout the land. He was a cruel and vicious man, obsessed by the intrigue and deception that went on within his own family. He had a number of wives, but his favourite was Mariamne. His sister, perhaps looking to have her child take his place, poisoned his mind against Mariamne and in the end, Herod had her, their two sons, her brother, her grandfather and her mother murdered. So what with a few Jewish babies to Herod? He didn't care about them. All he cared about was protecting his position.

The slaughter of the children in Bethlehem was a fulfilment of prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15 - This is what the Lord says: A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.

What does this mean? Rachael, Jacob's wife, was buried in Bethlehem, a few miles South of Jerusalem and Ramah is a few miles North of Jerusalem, so this marks the area where Herod ordered every boy under two killed.

Just before he died Herod had one male from each wealthy family gathered together with instructions that when he died they were to be slaughtered so that there would be genuine weeping and wailing at his death. Thankfully the order was not carried out.

Then we see God has a plan. Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my Son". This had been God's plan. Egypt was also under Roman rule but Herod had no authority there. There were already Jewish communities there, often consisting of people who had also fled from Herod.

Eventually Herod dies and Joseph has his other dreams – this time that they should return and they ended up in Nazareth. This also fulfilled the prophecies of the Old

Testament (Isaiah 11:1, 53:2-3). Nazareth was a small town. It was famous for not being famous. No one had ever heard of Nazareth. It isn't even mentioned in the Old Testament at all. Not far from Nazareth, the major highways running North/South and East/West crossed there. It was so INSIGNIFICANT, that in John 1:46, Nathanael said "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Jesus grew up there

Something about God's plan – likes the insignificant, lowly things

What he's looking for is a heart that is obedient – he has a plan for you.

So, what do we learn?

1. The Safest Place To Be, Is Where God Leads You.

- o The Wise Men followed a star, and it led them to the Christ-child.

- o The Wise Men followed God's instructions in a dream, and they escaped Herod's wrath.

- o Joseph followed the Angel's instructions in a dream, and escaped to Egypt.

- o Joseph followed God's instruction in a dream, and escaped the wrath of Archelaus.

The safest place you can be, is in the center of God's will. Whatever path you take in life, God knows where it will lead. How much better to follow the path that He leads you down.

2. A Christian Isn't Exempt From Troubles.

Look at all the suffering and trouble that the 1st Christmas brought about:

- o The Wise Men, avoiding the wrath of Herod.

- o Mary & Joseph fleeing for their life.

- o Multitudes of innocent babies killed by a mad King.

We are not exempt from trouble – But God is with us.

3. God is in control

- a. We can be at peace when we are living in God's will. It's not that bad things won't happen to us – they might, but we know that God has a plan and will work things out. Everything that happened in the Christmas story was planned out by God. You can see His hand in the Christmas story every step of the way. God is in control.

Joseph and Mary experienced "Post-Christmas Blues". They didn't have their baby in Bethlehem, then "live happily ever after". Their dreams of going back to Nazareth to

live a quiet and peaceable life, were postponed for a few years. Their life was nothing like they had planned ... or expected.

Maybe you are experiencing “Post-Christmas Blues”. Maybe your Christmas wasn’t all that you expected. Now that Christmas is over, maybe the excitement has passed ... AND ... your balloon has popped.

GUESS WHAT? God is still in charge! He didn’t leave Mary & Joseph in Bethlehem to go it alone. He didn’t leave them in Egypt to work it out. He won’t leave us either.

God is still on the Throne. God is still in control! His light still shines in the darkness.