

Sermon for Advent Mid-Week #2

Date: December 9, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Micah 5:2–5a

Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 1:3–9

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1–12

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1–12

Sermon Title: To Set You Free from All Your Sorrow

Hymns:

LSB 397 – As with Gladness Men of Old

LSB 933 – My Soul Rejoices

LSB 936 – Sing Praise to the God of Israel

LSB 333 – Once He Came in Blessing



Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Matthew 2:1–12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

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Grace, peace and mercy be yours in Jesus' name. Amen.

The music in the shopping malls has changed. It is now geared up to call us to reminiscences of sugarplums dancing in our heads. The scent wafting from confectioners is all that much more sweet. Visions of family and friends with beaming faces are all about us. Behind all of that is the marketing of joy. Joy, as it is sold, can be yours if you follow the wisdom of the advertisers.

For all the joy that we are promised there are many who are far removed from joy. There are those who mourn for loved ones, so many this year lost to a plague of pestilence. There are those who are anxious over strained finances. There are relationships that are strained or taxed by bad behavior.

Joy can be hard to come by. Where can you find it? Right here. This season brings joy as we anticipate Jesus' birth, but it takes time to get there. We are tempted to jump the gun, skip over Advent, and get right to Christmas. That is not how life works. The things that bring us joy should be worth the wait. The things that bring us joy don't come easily. They require patience. As we wait, distractions try to rob us of joy. They come trying to drag us into the void of sorrow. So just when joy should be flooding over us, it seems fleeting. As elusive as joy can sometimes be, sorrow takes hold far too quickly and easily.

You do have reason for joy. God provides you with daily bread, everything having to do with the support and needs of your body and life. There are always plenty of reasons to live on joy, but we are, too often, too easily distracted from it.

Herod was distracted. The Magi, the Wise men, arrive in Jerusalem looking for the One who has been born King of the Jews. Herod calls the scribes to ascertain where this King was to be born. The answer is found in the prophet Micah. The promise of the Lord, delivered by the prophets, is fulfilled in Jesus. What generations of the faithful had longed to see, what so many had spent their lives desiring and pining, now is fulfilled. That is the reason for joy.

Not for Herod. He is distracted by a lust for power and delusions of grandeur. You see Herod was an illegitimate king. He was not even Jewish. He sits on the throne because Rome put him there. Any claim to the throne is a threat to his very comfortable life. When he heard of the birth of a king he plots murder to safeguard his power.

When joy departs, sorrow finds a home. Distractions are the devil's tool, he wants you to look away from the manger, look away from the cross and look in the mirror. There, he says, is the real source of joy. "Find it in yourself" he says. Then

when things don't go as you had planned you get distracted from joy, as thoughts over how things never going your way plague your mind, and the devil laughs.

Do you see how it works. Your focus is turned away from Jesus and onto yourself, on what you don't have rather than what you have been given. You lose sight of the God-given gifts and joy flees. Just like it did in Eden one afternoon, when a piece of fruit was eaten.

Rather than rejoicing in all that God provides, you are distracted by other things. You want and ponder what others have instead of seeing the Lord's bounty you already have. When joy departs, sorrow makes your heart its home. The longer it stays, the more sinister it becomes. Sorrow in impatient.

Joy requires patience as you wait for the realization of what you desire. Sorrow feeds off your impatience. The longer you go without having what you desire the deeper sorrow becomes. Sorrow tells you that joy does not come by waiting. Sorrow says, "I want it now."

Jesus answers our sorrow by who He is. He will not be who Herod wants Him to be, a rival who can easily be killed so power can be preserved. He will not be who you want Him to be, a servant who gives blessings on demand. Jesus will be who He is. He will be who you need Him to be.

You see Jesus is who He is when the Magi arrive. Matthew says when they saw the child, they fell down and worshiped Him. Thirty years later, the women at the tomb see Jesus and will do the same thing. Then the Eleven will meet Jesus in Galilee and they worship Jesus too. That kind of humble worship is reserved for God alone. The Magi knew it. The women at the tomb knew it. The disciples knew it. They knew who was before them.

The women at the tomb were overjoyed to see Jesus alive, and so were His disciples. This is the kind of God that you have. The kind that chooses to humble Himself to be born not in legendary Jerusalem but in lowly Bethlehem. He is the God that chooses to die and rise so that you will receive what you need, forgiveness and salvation through repentance, rather than what you think you want or need.

Our might King's greatness is found in His humility. Matthew tells us that the Magi "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." Matthew is making the point that there is reason for joy, and it's all because Jesus is who He is. He is the God who gives you not what you want, but what you need. His coming in the flesh, His dying and rising in the flesh, is all so that you can be given forgiveness, so that you can be saved.

Why worship this Child? Because the Lord has revealed to the Magi, and us, who this Child is and why He has come. He is the source of true joy and peace. He set you free from all sorrow.

He is Christ the Lord.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



As we Gather

Children's Sermon