

## “Get Up and Go!”

**Scripture: Matthew 2:13-23**

Graphic: traveling, danger

Key Verses: 2:21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

Theme: Christmas Day is over, but there’s more to the story. God called Joseph and Mary to navigate the dangers of the world in order to live for Christ. God is calling us to get up and go into a foreign land where he leads us in order to live for Christ, to reject the culture’s need to put Christ away, and use the gifts God has given us to give glory to God.

### 1) Introduction

- a) Gosh, it seems like just yesterday we were celebrating Christmas Day, doesn’t it? 😊 Oh wait...we were!
- b) I hope everyone had a great day with family and friends, maybe quiet and reflective for some. Maybe you had time to think about the shepherds and the angels and the wise men from the East.
- c) Maybe you thought about Joseph and Mary and the “little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.”
- d) We love these characters in the story of Christmas, and our visions of them leave us with warm and fuzzy feelings.
- e) I have to admit, Christmas seems to work, right?! All the traditions and trappings...all the wonderful chances to tell people about the incarnated God come to earth. This holiday, that has taken centuries to develop, works, for the most part, even despite the commercialism and chaos.
- f) But now that the Christmas Day frenzy is passing, I can’t help but ask the question: What’s next? Is that all there is to Christmas? Is there a lasting effect that Christmas has on us that is something more than what Christmas appears to be? I think we ask ourselves that question and then pass by the question faster than the day-old breakfast casserole.
- g) We usually stop reading the story of Christmas when we get passed the shepherds and the wise men...we might even go with Jesus to the temple when he’s a few days old so Mary and Joseph can have him dedicated and circumcised.

- h) But then we move on right? We pack away the nativity scene and look forward to New Year's Eve! The sweetness of Christmas will be neatly stored away for another year and when it comes out again, we'll enjoy it all the same...
- i) But maybe you suspect that there is more than just sweetness to this story. Even in the story we read from Luke on Christmas Eve, there was a journey for a pregnant lady...there was Jesus being born in a dirty feeding trough...there was some fear and some uncertainty. It wasn't all joy, we can tell from the Gospel stories.
- j) If we were to scratch the surface of any Christmas card image, we uncover more to this story. We see struggle, and greed, and passion, danger and death.
- k) So why does Christmas work so well? Is it that we've ignored the difficult parts and focused on the warm and fuzzy parts? That theory may have merit, but I sense that there is more to the Gospel stories than what we generally perceive. There's more to our God than a nice story about a baby.
- l) **And** could we throw a monkey wrench into the whole business that would cause Christmas *not* to work? I don't know!
- m) Actually, Christmas almost didn't happen. If we dig beneath the peaceful picture of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, we find surprises. Take a close look at the gospel of Matthew, and you'll be stunned by the danger and death that permeate the original Christmas story. You want to talk about catastrophe in the making, you can start right here. Christmas should never have happened.
- n) You don't, for example, take your pregnant wife — pregnant with God— put her on a donkey, and pack her off on a 120-mile road trip.
- o) Second, if you do, you arrange for lodging, and don't just hope there will be a room in the inn! (unless you're me on your honeymoon - sorry about that, Stacy).
- p) Third, the child is born in a manger. Think about it. How do children survive these days? Answer is, back then, a lot of them didn't. Jesus did. It wasn't a sterile environment to have a child...not your typical birthing center.
- q) And then there were the wise men who hit a roadblock as they attempted to gain access to Jesus. Sure, the star in the sky is a big help as they make their way to Jerusalem, but once they arrive in the capital they run smack into

King Herod, who, we will find out today is already working on an exit strategy in case this new “king” isn’t found — and killed.

- r) This Christmas thing almost didn’t happen...and in today’s text from Matthew, we’ll see why. But we will also see a few new dimensions to the Christmas story...dimensions that prove to us that God is continuously carrying us through difficult situations in order for us to get up and go where He is calling us...
- s) Let’s open our bibles to Matthew 2, starting in verse 13...
- t) Let’s pray...

## 2) Scripture

### a) Read Matthew 2:13

- i) The houseguests (the wise men) have finally gone...the dishes are in the sink still...house a mess, right? What’s next? Mary and Joseph are doing their best to raise this Messiah-child, who is probably like 2 years old at this point.
- ii) And just as things seem to be settling down, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, again! He was probably thinking, “Now what?” The first time Joseph entertained an angel, it was to reassure him that the child Mary was carrying was the Messiah...everything was cool...marry her!
- iii) Now, this angel appears to tell Joseph in a dream that Jesus is now in danger because of King Herod. King Herod wants to kill him, because he didn’t want any competition.
- iv) But by God’s providence, Joseph and Mary are warned about this and we get the first command to **get up and go**...take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt...and remain there until I tell you...Herod is going to do this nasty thing...
- v) They couldn’t stay where they were...God was carrying them into a foreign land, running from the evil King Herod. This doesn’t really fit in to the cozy and culturally-acceptable picture of Christmas. But this is God’s plan for them...in order to protect Jesus...
- vi) And so Joseph, because he’s STILL a righteous man, obeys God, gets up, and goes...verse 14...

**b) Read verses 14-15**

- i) When the angel told Joseph to go...he went...middle of the night...gotta go to Egypt...
- ii) Now, this prophecy mentioned by Matthew comes from Hosea 11:1, and was originally about Israel itself and the return from exile in Egypt. Matthew takes this saying and applies it to Jesus for two reasons. First, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's intention for Israel...he is greater than Israel. Second, because Matthew knows that Joseph and Mary went to Egypt, he's using this phrase as a way to connect Jesus with the fulfillment of OT prophecy.
- iii) Remember that Matthew is trying to convince his readers and the world that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and the fulfillment of the Jewish Law.
- iv) And he uses OT scripture to do that...as he does again in this next section...verse 16

**c) Read verse 16-18**

- i) Basically, the news from the wise men was that Jesus was 2 years old and in Bethlehem...more importantly, that Jesus was the Messiah King! So Herod comes up with an evil plan to have Jesus destroyed.
- ii) The only problem is that he doesn't know where Jesus is...he'd have to search and search. It wasn't like today, where everyone knows our addresses and telephone numbers. And so, he figures if he kills all the babies two years old and younger, that'll do the trick...
- iii) Once again, Matthew ties this story to the OT and talking about Rachel, matriarch of the children of Israel, weeping because the Israelites were being taken into exile in Babylon.
- iv) Can you imagine the pain and anguish in the lives of the families in Bethlehem that were devastated when their little baby boys were murdered by these soldiers? That's not something we see on Christmas cards or even something we usually talk about.
- v) I don't have any good answers to that tragedy other than the fact that God plucked Joseph and Mary and Jesus out from that slaughter because Jesus had a greater plan.

vi) Some question why God would warn just one family, while the others were left to have their babies taken from them. Again, no good answers, but one commentator wondered what would have happened if the soldiers got to the village and found all the babies gone...probably, Herod would have had ALL the people killed and not just the babies.

vii) Again, the story of Christmas is not all about stars and manglers...

viii) But Herod died and the game changes again...

#### **d) Read verse 19-23**

i) Again, Joseph and Mary and Jesus are called upon to navigate the dangers of the ancient world and travel to the land of Israel.

ii) Get up, and go!

iii) Again, an angel appears to Joseph and, obediently, off they go into a new place. But this time, they had to make a detour because the son of Herod, Archelaus, was ruling in Judea and he was just as bad. Joseph was afraid that Archelaus would be still carrying out Herod's plans...

iv) And finally, they settle in Nazareth...a nowhere in the middle of somewhere else...not the place for a king or the Messiah, but the place chosen by God for Jesus to grow up into a man...

### **3) Application**

a) You see how Christmas almost didn't happen? For Joseph and Mary, Christmas wasn't what we see on the Christmas specials...it's not the picturesque scene of tranquility. Christmas was hard. Christmas was costly for them.

b) Today, the real point of Christmas is not easy, and in fact it can be costly, because it demands that we put "the hopes and fears of all the years" to work.

c) God is calling us to do three things as a response to Christmas...in response to the incarnation of God on earth:

d) First, following Joseph's obedient example, *God wants us to Get Up and Go where He is leading.*

- i) Part of this process is spending time together in prayer, discerning where it is that God is calling us to go. Joseph didn't just pop up and leave without knowing where it was God was leading him.
  - ii) Sometimes in the church, we go in a hundred directions because the church down the road is doing it, or because it'll attract more people to the church.
  - iii) Jesus' escape from harm had a specific path to follow, with specific players at specific times. Each of us is here right now to be part of something incredible that is happening in the body of Christ in Panama.
  - iv) At times in our history as a church, there have been more people...sometimes many less. But this is the time that God has chosen you to be part of his body right here, to listen to the Holy Spirit's leading, and to boldly step out into something amazing for the kingdom.
  - v) Will it be easy? No. Will God call us into foreign lands and uncomfortable situations? You can count on it!
  - vi) And just like God never forgot about Mary and Joseph in order to fulfill the plan to redeem the world, God will be with us.
  - vii) Christmas works because we are willing to engage in what God is doing, relying on Him to lead the way.
- e) Secondly, *God is calling us to reject the culture's desire to put Christ away for the rest of the year.* It may be acceptable to have a manger scene on public property during December, but the devil wants to destroy our efforts to display Christ throughout the year.
- i) We are called to go into the community and show others Christ. That might mean that we walk the streets to pray for our neighbors. That might mean we open our doors a little wider to invite people in that aren't like us.
  - ii) Jesus was being rejected by those in authority...sound familiar? Our job as followers of Christ is to allow God to shape our actions, our words, and our lives to be actual living nativity scenes all year.
- f) Finally, *God is calling us to use our spiritual gifts to serve Him through the ministry of the church.*

- i) For a portion of 2011, we will be exploring what it means to use our spiritual gifts for service to God. God gave us the Perfect Gift at Christmas time...Jesus. The gift of salvation and abundant life.
- ii) The wise men knew how special that baby was and so they gave him precious gifts of gold and presents. It was a response to what God had done for the world.
- iii) Our response to the spiritual gifts that God has already given to us is to learn more about our personal gifts, equip ourselves to use them for His glory, and encourage each other to serve as He leads us.

#### **4) Conclusion**

- a) As you pack your Christmas decorations and lights, I ask you to ponder your year-round response to Christmas...to Christ coming...to the events that made it possible for Christ to grow into a man...to die on a cross so you could be forgiven...
- b) What's your response to the eternal life offered through Jesus?
- c) As those boxes go into the attic for another year, what is God calling you to do for Him this year?
- d) The answer will not be easy to hear...Joseph didn't want to go to Egypt...he probably didn't want to pack up and go to Nazareth...
- e) But his response was simply to obey...and that response paved the way for God to unleash his kingdom on the world.
- f) Don't let the Christmas story end simply because the calendar says we have to wait until the day after Thanksgiving 2011.
- g) Let Christmas work in you and allow Christ to live in you every day...
- h) Now that we know there's way more to this story than meets the eye, we have the chance to have a truly Merry Christmas!
- i) Get up and go into this New Year with Christmas as your focus and God as your guide...
- j) Let's pray...