

Matthew 2

1st Sunday after Christmas

December 27, 1998

Decisions.

You college students are in the time of life of decisions.

That may be the biggest change from high school days - decisions.

What major to choose. What career to plan for. } Which job to take. }

Is this a person with whom I would want to spend my life?

Is the faith in which I was raised my faith, or only my parent's faith?

Are money and prestige the most important factors in deciding what I will do?

How much should I sacrifice to get to my goals?

Will I abstain from drinking? Have one beer - or two- or ten tonight?

Will I wait for marriage or live with this person?

Decisions.

And how will you decide? ^(students) Using a horoscope, a Bible, the advice of professors, inner feeling, signs in dreams, advice of friends, parents? Prayer?

The gospel today comes from a world nothing like your world. Wisemen and kings, infants slaughtered, a life saved.

And yet so much like your world where decisions matter and lead to other decisions. Where not everyone is seeking your good, but some may even be intending your harm. Or at least intending to get ahead of you, to leave you far behind.

After Jesus was born wise men came from the east. They saw a sign in the sky, a star rising. A king had been born but the sign was ambiguous. Where was this king - who was this king?

An obstacle arises before you, like a tree falling in your path. A sign? But what does it mean? That you should turn and go in another direction? That you should work harder to clear the path once more? Like the star the signs of our lives are ambiguous.

The wise men went to the palace- the place where kings are expected to be. Herod consulted those trained in the scriptures. Bethlehem is the place for kings to be born. The wise men headed there.

~~Still~~ ^T the star led them until they came to the place where Jesus was. They gave him gifts, fell down and worshipped him.

So often when we tell the story we stop here - as if there is an ending here. A conclusion.

In my own life I keep looking for those stopping places - moments when I can say it all turned out well. But I never find them for the story keeps on moving along. I get the job but now face new obstacles at work. The wedding is followed by an argument. A child's birth brings sleepless nights as illness is battled.

No sooner had the wise men worshipped the child than a who series of events came tumbling behind their visit. A dream to warn them not to return to Herod - a dream warning Joseph to flee to Egypt - Herod's order to slaughter all the children in and around Bethlehem that were two years old or younger. And so the joy and warmth of wise men kneeling before Jesus was swallowed up by hurried flight and journey across the harsh landscape. And then a time of waiting. Simply waiting in the foreign land. A time of no sign - no dream - no clear direction.

How often no matter what the decisions you make you will find yourself in Egypt, waiting. Nothing much will be happening - you'll be wondering if you are in the right place or if you have simply come to a dead end. *So much of life is waiting.*

For Joseph suddenly the waiting ended

Then one night another dream and Joseph is sent on his way home again. But this time he learned thorough word of mouth that Herod's son ^{ruled} over Bethlehem so Joseph ^{did} not return there but ^{chose} ~~stayed~~ to live in Nazareth. And so Jesus grew up in that most unpromising place.

by how do we learn from all of this?

As I prepared for this sermon I was struck by how often Matthew interrupts the story he tells to repeat a word of scripture: Again and again he writes: This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets.

In this world of ambiguous signs and dreams that may or may not be ^{from} ~~form~~ God the Lord has given to you the Holy Scriptures to read and search and understand. You will find in scripture God's word to direct your life and and to reveal its meaning. And as Matthew ^{just} ~~was~~ that he found everything there pointing to Jesus.

re-joining the world
In this world of signs and dreams stars God has send God's own Son. God gives Jesus to you to be the ending of your story. God gives you Jesus so your story will end in all your sins forgiven, all broken relationships reconciled, all death overcome by life, you in the presence of God for all eternity.

And in Jesus is the promise that no matter which road you find yourself going down Jesus will go down that road with you. In Bethleehm, In Egypt, In Nazareth with you. In palaces and stables and fleeing on dusty roads with you. In your successes and in your failures, in moments when you are sure you have decided right and in moments you are sure you have been doomed by a decision Jesus with you. St. Paul says it this way: For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He has decided to be your Lord and brother. Forever.