

The Christmas Story: Consolation
January 1, 2017
Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt." (Matthew 2:13-15 NLT)

It must have been a great consolation to Mary and Joseph to know that God was with them. After all, the angel of the Lord's warning and their obedient departure ensured the safety of their son, Jesus. Even though they faced a difficult road ahead, they had each other and their faith in God to see them through. Much like Mary and Joseph, most of us are also able to thrive when comforted by our faith and relationships with loved ones. God created us to be in relationship with Him, with others and with every living thing He so carefully placed in the world around us.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." (Genesis 2:18 NLT)

Digging Deeper

Consolation is found in three sources of comfort...

Family

- Joseph and Mary had a pretty rough start on their journey into parenthood. They probably faced harsh public scorn at the news of her pregnancy prior to marriage. They were turned away from an overflowing inn and forced to have their child in less than ideal conditions. Then an angel warns them to flee to Egypt where they would live as outsiders in a foreign land in order to prevent their son's execution. That's more than enough to drive a wedge between two people no matter how much you love each other. We can only imagine that their faith in God's promise for the future of their family was the glue that held them together. Describe how the love and support of your family (or small group) has gotten you through a difficult situation or time in your life.

Fellowship

- You might think of a hobbit named Frodo and a shiny gold ring when you hear the word fellowship. (Or maybe not, but let's run with this idea for a moment.) Those hobbits, elves and wizards had a common goal and established friendships that united them in their efforts to protect their people and overcome a myriad of dark forces and supernatural obstacles. While we will most likely not encounter a Gandalf or Aragorn in our travels, we will meet many people who, if we let them, can help us experience this thing called life a little more completely. Will you commit to be in fellowship with other believers in the coming year? If you are not already part of a small group, contact Mindy Clemons at mindy@mylhumc.net for more information on how to get connected in this way. Let's promise that we're going to "do life together" – no matter how it comes.

Faith

- What you and I need to understand is that just because things don't go as we have planned, it doesn't mean they're not going as God has planned. That's not to say God causes suffering and setbacks, but He certainly isn't surprised by them. So the question is: When we face times of trial and trouble, will we choose to trust God? In difficult and disappointing circumstances, do we have faith to believe the Lord will see us through and accomplish His ultimate will for our lives? How do we do this? We exercise our faith muscles by fixing our eyes on God, trusting in His perfect timing and drawing our strength from Him.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

Conclusion

Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A cry was heard in Ramah – weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead." (Matthew 2:16-18 NLT)

The tragic scene had been set. The wrath of an angry king wielded upon countless innocent children and their families all to feed King Herod's lustful desire for power and to remain the one and only King of Judea. But we know Herod's murderous acts were all in vain. The one true King was not to die in infancy, but rather to rule forever over all those who faithfully proclaim the reason for their faith: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again!" Take comfort in that great truth throughout 2017.