



The Trinity Pulpit



The Journey Begins

Matthew 2:13-23

Dr. Jeff Roberts

January 6, 2008

I am yet to purchase the item that was one of this past Christmas season's biggest sellers, a GPS. Now many of you have a GPS system in your car. Some of you have one as part of the accessories of your car and others have purchased your own portable unit and are enjoying being told where to go. I think there are some of you that like a GPS because you like not wasting time and you want to get to your destination as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Some people like the GPS systems because the truth is you are lonely and you like the woman's voice on the GPS system. It is good to have some company when you have to travel. Some have a GPS just because it is the latest thing and everybody has one in their car now.

I must admit that I am a little adventurous still. I still like trying to find my own way around town, although I will go to Mapquest.com and get directions before I venture out on a visit to an area of town I am not familiar. I am afraid that if I had a GPS, I would totally frustrate it by choosing my own shortcuts and scenic routes. I would constantly be hearing that comment from the GPS when you choose another route than what is planned. You know that comment that is said with a sense of annoyance in the ladies voice. It is recalculating.

Recalculating. That is the comment when you have gone off course and you need to get back on course. When the GPS recalculates it is accessing your current location and calculating your next steps toward your destination.

Today we begin a new year, and our theme for the year is "Embrace the Journey." Our thought for today is "The Journey Begins."

However, for our journey to begin, we need a moment of recalculation.

Our text today gives us the story of Jesus' infancy, and there we find a story of a continual recalculation for Jesus and his family so to fulfill the promise and the plan of God. Matthew gives us a different story than that of Luke. Luke's story is the more familiar one with the inn, shepherds, the manger and the angels. Matthew's story gives us the characters of the three wise men or astrologers and Herod. It seems that Herod was jealous of all of this discussion of a king being born in Bethlehem. When he discovered that wise men from the east had traveled following the heavenly signs and the great star, he was more concerned. Out of his jealousy he derived a plan to kill Jesus. His plan was for the wise men to go and find the baby and then tell him where the baby could be found. Herod had said the purpose was to worship the child, but, of course, it was to end Jesus' life. However, after the Magi found Jesus, they were warned in a dream of Herod's plan and told to go home a different way and not back to Herod. When Herod heard that he had been duped, he decided to take matters into his own hands, and after calculating when the child would have been born, he ordered the murder of all male children under the age of two. Yet, before this happened, an angel appeared to Joseph and warned him of Herod's plan, and Joseph, Mary and Jesus left in the darkness of the night and fled to Egypt.

So, not only was Jesus homeless at his birth, his first years of life would be that of a refugee. They traveled to Egypt where scholars tell us there was a thriving Jewish community. There, Joseph and his family could find

work and help as they fled as political refugees. We are told that later Herod died and another angel appeared to Joseph and told him that it was now safe to return to Israel because Herod was dead. We know that Herod died in 4 B.C., and most scholars have suggested that Jesus' birth was probably about 6 B.C. which means Jesus would have still been a very young child preparing to move again. They made their plans to move, but they learned that Archelaus, Herod's son, was now in charge of the region of Bethlehem, so they were again warned in a dream and instead went to Nazareth where Jesus would be raised.

This infancy story of Jesus is a story of recalculation. The purpose was to keep Jesus safe and to fulfill God's promises and prophecy. The method by which this was achieved was recalculation in Jesus' family's life. The result is the miraculous story of God's care, plan and accomplishment of Jesus' journey from Bethlehem to Egypt and finally home to Nazareth.

I think if we are going to begin our own journey with God this year and be able to tell of God's care and his plan being accomplished in our lives, then what we need on this first Sunday is a spiritual recalculation. The text suggests that there are two things which are needed in a spiritual recalculation. The first is to honestly assess our present situation.

In each of the moves of Jesus in our story, there is an honest assessment of the present. There is the real political threat of Herod. Herod's threats of murder were not hollow threats. When Joseph heard of this threat, it rang true in his mind. Herod was known as Herod the Great. He had done many great things including buildings, military victories and peace for Israel. However, Herod was an insanely jealous and paranoid man. When he was elected he had the whole Sanhedrin—the ruling party—put to death. He had several members of his family put to death. They included three sons, a brother-in-law, a wife, a mother-in-law, an uncle and advisor of his mother-in-law as well as her brother. Augustus Caesar once said of Herod it was better to be his sow or pig than his son, for the former had a chance to live. When Herod said he was going to search for and kill the

baby Jesus, it was an honest assessment of the situation and demanded a recalculation of plans.

When Herod died, again a recalculation was required. Now Joseph, Mary and Jesus could return and they made plans to come home to family from their time of refuge in Egypt. However, they learned that Archelaus was now in charge in the region they were going to return to. Archelaus was much like his father. In fact, not long after Herod's death Archelaus ordered his own massacre. So, again, Joseph is warned and a recalculation occurs, and Jesus and his family come to Nazareth and make their home. In each step of the story there is an honest assessment.

Our journey with God begins with an honest assessment. Eric Hoffer, who is known as the longshoreman philosopher, said, "to become different

from what we are, we must have, first, some awareness of what we are." To have a spiritual recalculation and begin a journey with Jesus, there must be an honest assessment of who you are right now.

Let me give you four questions to ask to begin to assess who you are right now as we begin our journey with Jesus this year.

1. Who are you in contrast to who you want to be spiritually? Honestly take a look at who you are spiritually. Do you want to have a better witness for Christ? Do you want a stronger prayer life? Do you want to be a person who makes better decisions? Do you want to be someone who has more faith? Do you want to be someone who responds to life with joy? Who do you want to be spiritually and how would you assess your current lifestyle through process and actions at this moment?

2. What gifts do I possess? Honestly consider what your spiritual gifts are. In what way has God blessed you so you can bless others? John Maxwell writes, "We all begin a journey with something going for us." None of us are starting from scratch. Each of us already has a story to tell, a witness to give, a blessing to impart. What gifts do you have right now?

3. What are some things that are holding you



***"To have a spiritual
recalculation and begin
a journey with Jesus,
there must be an honest
assessment of who you
are right now."***

back? Just as we have gifts, we also have fears and failures that hold us back. There were many reasons for Joseph not to trust the angels in this story, yet he put aside his fear and had faith. Honestly look at your life and name the things that are holding you back from being what you know God wants you to be. For some of us it is a hidden sin. For others it is pride, time, attitude, fear or previous failure.

4. What sacrifice needs to be made in my life for me to begin this journey with Jesus? For some of us it will be a sacrifice of time. We are going to have to carve out some time to spend in prayer or reading God's word, or to serve at the church or be part of a mission opportunity. For some of us it is a financial sacrifice. We have been withholding God's tithe for our use. Our financial priorities are not what they should be and we are going to have to sacrifice something else so we can be pleasing to God financially. Some of us are going to have to sacrifice an activity or a habit that is not pleasing to God. We know that it is not pleasing to God but we continue to participate in that activity or continue that habit. Some of us need to make a sacrifice of anonymity. No one at work knows what we believe. We have simply remained silent when the conversation turns toward or against God and the church. What sacrifice is going to have to be made for me to begin a journey with Jesus this year?

A new journey with God begins with an honest assessment of where we are presently in our lives.

There is a second step. It is learning to discern God's leadership. In our story there was an honest assessment of the present situation and there was the ability to discern God's direction and the faith to follow. Many of us would say at this point, "If God would send me an angel, then following him would be much easier. If we look at the text, in each circumstance God spoke to Joseph in a dream. In the case of Mary, the angel is said to appear to her like a vision. Zechariah also had a vision of an angel in the temple as the birth of John the Baptist is foretold. The shepherds have angels appear to them. The wise men are following and discerning a heavenly star or sign. So, in the birth narratives of Jesus, God speaks in various ways. There are dreams, angels, stars, reason and ancient scripture.

The question is: "How do we learn to discern God's leadership?" Let me give you three thoughts from our text.

1. We place ourselves spiritually where we can hear God speak. If we look at our story we find that Joseph is described a certain way before an angel ever appears to him in a dream. In Matthew 1:19 Joseph is described as a righteous man. That means he did what he thought was pleasing to God. Joseph lived his life with the thought, "How can I please God?" He was a man who tried to do what he knew was right. Here is the first step for us: To live the way we already know God expects us to live. We really don't have to be told that God wants us to pray, read the Bible, worship, serve others, and consider the welfare of those who are hurting. Most of us are very aware that this is what God expects of our lives. To begin to hear from God we need to begin by being and doing what we already know God expects from our lives. We need to live righteous lives.

2. We must learn by experience. There comes a time for faith when we are on a journey with God. Joseph had to take that first step of faith when the angel spoke to him in a dream. He could have said it was only a dream. But because Joseph lived a life that put him in position to hear from God and to please God, then when God spoke he believed God could do marvelous things and he responded by faith. That made the next revelation easier to follow. What you find with most mature Christians is that somewhere in their life there was a moment they took a step of faith and proved God to be faithful. From that point on, they learned more and more how to trust and follow God.

3. We must believe that God is still at work. We have to believe like Joseph that God is continually at work and wanting us to follow his plan for our lives. God will speak to us over and over again because more than anything else God wants us to be in conversation and relationship with him even more than he wants us to know the plan. We must live our lives with the anticipation of God speaking.

As we begin this journey together, we must begin with spiritual recalculation. First, we must honestly assess our situation, and we must learn to



"[We must] live the way we already know God expects us to live."

hear God's voice that we might follow.

This principle of journeying with God is something that needs to be experienced as individuals but also as a church.

What is the state of our church as we begin 2008? Let us use our five Value Statements as our guide.

Worship

Trinity Baptist Church values biblical worship, which stresses the presence and the majesty of God. Worship should be God directed. Worship should inform, challenge, and encourage the believer. Worship should declare God's message of love through Christ. Worship should involve all of the senses and the intellect.

This statement is a reminder of what we value in worship. This statement does not include words or phrases that refer to music style or styles of worship such as contemporary, traditional, liturgical or gospel. Instead, our guide for worship is whether what we say and sing honor God and is Christ centered.

Fellowship

Trinity Baptist Church values genuine fellowship, which is intentional and produces unity and harmony in the church family, the body of Christ.

There are many in our congregation who find their best friends and community here at church. But not everyone has that experience. We like to say we are multi-generational, but that simply means we have programs for all ages. What we must strive for is inter-generational experiences. I want to encourage you to get to know someone you do not know. Go to lunch with a new family. Take the initiative to attend an event that you normally would not attend. Make room for others in your Sunday School class and more so in your life.

Discipleship

Trinity Baptist Church values life-long spiritual learning for a Christian. We value spiritual growth, which begins before conversion, leads to conversion, and develops the Christian character.

The most important program of our discipleship at Trinity is Sunday School, so I want to encourage you to find a Sunday School class and become a part of a small group. At the same time it is going to be important that in the future we continue to create new Sunday School classes to make space and a place for new people. I want you to pray how God wants you to be a part of a new experience in Sunday School

Ministry

Trinity Baptist Church values care and concern for one another within the church. We view each member as a part of a family of faith to be cherished and accepted as a brother or sister in Christ.

Our church has grown to a place where it is impossible for our ministers and our deacons to give care to our congregation. We need all of us caring for each other. We need to notice when people are missing and we need to take the initiative of care for one another.

Missions

Trinity Baptist Church values active participation in sharing the love of God through Christ with the world. We value the spoken witness, the witness through creative arts, and the witness of the work of our hands.

Our missions ministry has grown and become a model for many churches in North Carolina. I am so proud of how we reach out to those who are hurting and have needs. Yet, there is one aspect of this statement where we are failing. This is the area of evangelism. Last year we baptized 55 people which is something to celebrate. However, once you look at this number you discover that very few of them were new Christian converts. Is it too much to ask for us to lead one person a year to Christ? In the coming year our Evangelism Committee is going to lead us to learn how to share our faith with others with the goal of leading others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

What we need as individuals and as a church is an honest assessment of where we are and the faith to follow God into the future. Let us embrace the journey that God has for us.

Recalculating. . . Recalculating. . . LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN!

