
The sermon text for today is based on the
Gospel, Matthew Chapter 2, Verses 13 to23.

Treasured

Here is part of today's Gospel story once more.

"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.' ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And in verse twenty-two we read the following account...

"Having been warned in a dream, Joseph and Mary travelled to the district of Galilee, ²³ and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene."

Listening to this story in today's Bible-reading, three important words rose to the surface of my mind.

Guided, protected and treasured.

Mary and Joseph were not aware of the imminent danger awaiting them. In addition, they did not have a personal plan for their newly formed family life, until this angel from God arrived to warn them and guide them to safety.

During your life have you had an encounter with an angel?

I can honestly say that has not been one of my life experiences; however this story does remind me of an unusual meeting.

During my years as a professional photographer I once had the privilege of photographing a famous marathon-runner. It was not his exceptional sporting talents which had made him a celebrity; rather it was a severe handicap, a considerable physical impairment which had elevated him to international prominence. This marathon-runner was blind and in order to participate in the gruelling forty-two

kilometre race, he was required to hold onto the hand of a guide-runner, who was to accompany him throughout the entire journey. This guide-runner would provide him with all the important information to ensure a safe journey and the arrival at a planned destination. Throughout this race the guide-runner would continually provide guidance for each step of the way.

Joseph, Mary and her child, Jesus, were in a situation not unlike the blind marathon-runner, whom I met so many years ago. Joseph and Mary were provided with guiding instructions. In their case though, it was an angel of the Lord, who was their guide-runner, who enlightened them with God's vision for their lives. WE can clearly see that it is God who provided them with personal protection and guidance.

I don't know about you, but an angel of God has not been part of my life and am I suggesting that perhaps there is no need for an angel, because God has already taken care of you and me by providing us with a very precious gift.

It is of course, the presence of the Holy Spirit, residing inside our hearts, yours and mine.

The apostle John assures us of this when he wrote these words.

"When he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak of his own; he will only speak what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (John 16:13)

There have been many occasions during my life, journeying each day with Jesus, when the Holy Spirit instructed my mind in a certain way. I'm sure that in your life you also have been blessed with these very special moments, when something happened that left you pondering about the presence of God in your life.

We can see each other clearly, seated here in this church, and yet I suggest to you that each one of us is seriously vision-impaired. We are unable to see the spiritual enemies which surround us, just like Joseph, Mary and her child Jesus were unable to recognise the dangers which lay ahead. But this was no ordinary couple, because Jesus was not an ordinary child.

Because of this child, because of Jesus, the son of God, our Saviour and Lord, you and I, we are also God's children.

And God cares for his children.

For that reason God has provided you and me with a personal guide-runner, the Holy Spirit, who seeks to guide you safely through this life until we see Him face to face.

During this marathon journey we will encounter many joys, delightful moments, but also some formidable personal challenges and to further equip us for this journey through life, God has provided us with yet another invaluable aid, namely the Word of God.

The living Word of God has the power to illuminate and instruct our mind, allowing us to make sound Christian decisions, often quite contrary to the world's way. Loving God and our neighbour will bless God, your neighbour and our personal life. The Bible is filled with life-giving and guiding instructions for those who seek to be peacemakers. In addition God assures us of his faithful loving presence, even when our sinful nature gets in the way at times. Here are two verses, which ought to provide much comfort.

In the book of Psalms we have this wonderful promise that *“God’s faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”* (91) In the book of Isaiah God promises to *“lead his blind people by roads never travelled, making their rough road smooth before them.”*

Once a month I will visit a nearby beach, but not just to go for a walk, but I shall take along my metal-detector. This wonderful electronic device was a generous birthday gift a couple of years ago, and so, once a month, for a couple of hours I will be sweeping this device from side to side as I walk along a beach, hoping to find something of value. Indeed, during my first attempt I located a seventy-year old silver coin. Since then I've found a number of other coins, but most of the items hidden beneath the beach-sand, I'm sad to report, was just a load of metallic waste such as discarded bottle-tops.

This once-a-month search for treasure, you might say, this search highlights the third finding in today's Gospel reading.

Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus were guided, protected and treasured.

You are treasured. You are treasured by God, because Jesus has saved you and me from our sinful state, and now we are children of God. God takes care of you and me, because of Jesus.

When the angel of the Lord visited Mary, written about by Luke, the Gospel-writer made this important observation.

“Mary treasured all these things in her heart.”

When I search the beach with my metal-detector, it is a search for something hidden, something of value.

Treasures are usually hidden and this ought to remind us of something special.

Inside your heart, hidden inside you, there is a great treasure. God has provided you with a very precious gift, his Holy Spirit, to keep you safe, because you are a child of God.

Like Mary, let us treasure these things as we embark on our journey through this New Year 2023, a year filled with 365 days. Perhaps we should consider them instead as 365 daily steps of our personal lives, and God desires to be your faithful guide during each one of those days.

Perhaps during the following week, write the word TREASURED on a piece of paper, and stick it where you can see it each day, to remind you that you are God’s treasure and that He loves you so much, that He gave His only son Jesus Christ, to save us.

You know what provides me with much comfort?

It is the fact that I’m not in charge of my life. Yes, I am responsible for my behaviour, but I am not in charge. Our Bible-story makes this very clear that God is in charge of our lives. What a wonderful comfort this is.

May the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding, keep your heart and mind safe in Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Amen