

Speaker 1: It hasn't been a marvelous journey to Bethlehem this month because we have been in the presence of angels every Sunday. We've been listening to angel messengers as the story of God's good news unfolded, but today's text, today's angel visit comes with tragedy. The story changes in a significant way. Let me encourage you to listen to the details of the situation that prompts the angel message in the time of King Herod. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea wise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, where is the child who was born King of the Jews for we have seen this, his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.

Speaker 1: When King Herod heard this, he was frightened and all Jerusalem with him and calling together the chief priests and scribes of the people. He inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea for so it has been written by the prophet. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time that the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.

Speaker 1: When they had heard the King, they set out and they're ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy on entering the house. They saw the child and his mother Mary. They knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chest. They presented gifts to him of gold, frankincense and myrrh and having been warned in a dream not to to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Now after they had left and angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

Speaker 1: Then Joseph got up, took the child in his mother by night and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under according to the time that he had learned from the Wiseman. When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to a dream in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, get up. Take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. For those who were seeking the child's life are dead.

Speaker 1: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. After being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee and there he made his home in a town called Nazareth so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled. He will be called a Nazarene, the word of God for the people of God. I wonder if you're old enough to remember the commercial for minute skin Bracer in the late night, the late seventies that ended with the tagline. Thanks. I needed that. Remember that commercial? It was about the skin tightening qualities of this particular aftershave and do you remember what happened in the commercial, what the product was compared to? It was a slap in the face. Remember actually a man slapping himself in the face. That man being a young John Goodman. Interestingly enough, thanks. I needed that.

Speaker 1: Well, that's the way that I think about the nativity narrative when we get to the second chapter of Matthew's gospel and what seems like the blink of an eye for us as we follow these stories, we go from Shepherd's tending, sleepy sheep and a pop up angel concert to tragic death of two year old children. It is jarring for us to say the least. The angel message to Joseph this time is take your family and run for your life. Herod the great was a ruler hand picked by the Roman empire. But in spite of that, he had to fight for three years just to ascend his throne. And so he made it his business to take out any threat to his power. He made tie, maintained his own private security force. He built fortresses in Jerusalem, Cesarea Masada and elsewhere to ensure that he would never be far from a defendable refuge. When there were rumors of plots in his own family, he eliminated his wife and his son. So it's not surprising. It's not surprising that this visit by the mad shy inquiring about someone who would be King of the Jews. It touched a nerve for Herod. It is consistent with his character. We don't have a record of the death toll in the small village of Bethlehem, but you can imagine the devastation. So how is it that we're supposed to understand such an unspeakable tragedy that interrupts the joy of God's good news? The word made flesh.

Speaker 1: What are we supposed to do with this story? Just a few days after Christmas in her book left to tell E Matt Coolay LA Bengazi tells the story of the day that her family realized they had missed their chance to flee the civil war in Rwanda. It was her third year at college. She was 22 she remembers too many mornings. I woke to the sound of hatred because the local radio station in her college town had been taken over by extremist tutus, promising the extermination of all Tutsis if anything happened to the president of Rwanda who was who to in maca Lake says she did her best in those days to ignore the tie rates coming from the radio. But then she got a letter from her father encouraging her over the Easter break to come home. Travel was treacherous. She traveled with her brother, but once they were safe around the kitchen table at home, her dad who was an and a leader in the village encourage the family to remain calm.

Speaker 1: We hear rumors of death squads, he said to them and stories about death lists, but after a few days you realize it's all been greatly exaggerated. We are not going to abandon our home and everything we have worked for because nervous people have vivid imaginations. That was the advice of her father. Next morning the news came via the family radio that the president was dead. His plane being shot down out of the sky and within minutes roadblocks and military checkpoints were set up all over the Capitol. The radio announcer then began to read the names of the people the soldiers had killed already and the fifth name on the list was immaculate, says uncle her mother's sobbed. These are immaculate words, a painful silence envelop to my family. As we realized that we'd missed our opportunity to escape the night before. It was the morning of April 7th, 1994 we didn't know it yet, but the genocide had begun.

Speaker 1: Do you remember the details? How the killing spree lasted three months and claimed the lives of nearly a million Rwandans, almost impossible to imagine. Immaculate. I spent 91 days hiding with seven other Tutsi women in a tiny bathroom in her pastor's home, the door of the bathroom covered by a large wardrobe so that it couldn't be seen. Her pastor was Hutus. She prayed her way through those days again and again. She heard voices outside the angry mobs demanding once more that they were going to

search the pastor's home. Most of the macula, his family was lost in the civil war and yet she describes in her book an amazing spiritual transformation that takes place through her prayers. She writes, during my waking hours, I was in constant communication with God, brain, meditating for 15 to 20 minute hours every day and in the midst of genocide, I found my salvation.

Speaker 1: I knew that my bond with God would transcend that tiny room where we hit. It would transcend the war and the Holocaust. Day after day, I lifted my heart to the Lord and God filled me up with love and I knew even if my parents had perished, I would never be an orphan immaculate and her family didn't have an angel warning in time for them to flee their village. Theologians suggest that God's warning to Joseph raises some questions, some problems when it comes to Providence, which is the protective care of God and some questions around theodicy, which is defense of God's goodness and view of the existence of evil in the world. Why didn't God warn the other parents in Bethlehem? Joseph was given an inside advantage even before the angel warning. He knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He knew that the maj I had visited Herod to inquire about the location of the baby, his baby who would be King of the Jews.

Speaker 1: At the very least, our scripture this morning is a warning for us about what is to come the inbreaking of God's kingdom. The good news of Jesus Christ is always at the very least disruptive. Matthew's gospel warns us that Jesus is coming into the world to shake things up, to challenge those in power to question the practices of religious insiders. You remember what Jesus said to them that they strain out gnats and swallow camels, paying attention to the wrong things. Jesus had come to instruct the rich young ruler that he had to sell everything he had first. He had come to give the best seats at the banquet to folks who couldn't buy and ticket. He had come to warn us that we are living our lives consumed by priorities that have nothing to do with God's plan for us,

Speaker 1: but we know that already don't we? From the angel stories that we have studied together this month, the baby that saccharine and Elizabeth had been praying for comes in God's good time, but it isn't necessarily theirs. Mary's is a news is enough to make her the talk of the town and not in a good way. Joseph's heart breaks as he considers what will become of Mary when he dismisses her quietly and now this disruption taking their baby and leaving their home, their families do. They have time to say goodbye. Did they just disappear in the middle of the night? All that is familiar. All that is come for Dean is lost as they become refugees in a strange place. How is it you think that we came to confuse the good ones life with being faithful?

Speaker 1: That's not according to Matthew's gospel. Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 10 do you not think I have come to bring peace to the earth? I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I've come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and once foes will be members of one's family, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more is also not worthy. Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy. Those who find their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake, they will find it. This good news of great joy that the world has been waiting for does not come easily. It is never convenient. And so brothers and sisters, as we prepare to lose ourselves in a

This transcript was exported on Dec 31, 2019 - view latest version [here](#).

new year of ministry, let us ask God for an extra measure of courage and clarity as together we seek to follow Jesus.