

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

Sunday 27th December 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be true and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last weekend I was chatting with some of the tech guys about various bits and pieces including some great songs from the 80s, and so when I was listening to the music later in the week, it got me thinking: what songs would sum up 2020? This kind of thing is often done when we approach the start of a new year and so I did some research on the internet and via Braes Blether, and here's a video with some of the ideas that came up.

(PLAY VIDEO)

Feel free to add your own ideas in the Live Chat at home.

Obviously, what was shared there is meant to be slightly humorous, echoing some of the feelings that we've probably all felt in this past year. Music has the capacity to capture some of what we feel, and we can often link a piece of music to a particular season or event in life, and whenever we hear that music it brings back the emotion and the memories of long ago. Music can even give us a sense of articulation in what we are feeling.

Nevertheless, there have been other feelings this year, feelings of genuine isolation, of grief and loss, of anger and frustration, and of fear and worry. In the face of such emotion, no song can truly capture this; no song, can speak to the rawness of our emotions and of our pain.

Because songs come and go, they're here today and... gone tomorrow, and so don't we need something more than a song as we reflect on 2020 and prepare to enter into the new year? I think we do, and that's where **Matthew chapter 2 comes in.**

It's a tough portion of Scripture; it's not one we're going to use much in Sunday School. We often forget the next part of the Christmas story – we stop at the magi bringing their gifts to the baby Jesus, because it's cute and it's heart-warming, and so we tend to gloss over how their story ended, that they too were forced to flee. **But there is that one final part of the Christmas story, captured in what we read today: Jesus, the promised Messiah, is born in a land and at a time full of trouble, tension, violence**

and fear. Before He had even learnt to walk, Jesus was a homeless refugee with a price on His head.

So, what are we meant to see here today? What do we see here of the identity of Jesus and what has that got to do with us on the cusp of 2021?

Well, firstly, let's remember **what we read last Sunday:**

'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

(Matthew 1:23)

This is Jesus, He is Immanuel, God with us and His coming into the brokenness of our world is how He will go about changing the world; the promised Messiah will not live in pomp and ease, instead He is with us. For there's no point in Him arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery;

there's no point in Him having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and injustice. If He is to be truly... Immanuel, God with us, then He must be with us in our pain and in our brokenness; He must know what it is to live in fear, in need and in isolation.

Friends, we have more than a song, we have a Saviour who is with us in the struggles. Not that those struggles always miraculously disappear; after all, Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew real hardship, even though they also knew moments of God's protection and provision. But God was with them and God is with us; we have more than a song, we have a Saviour, Immanuel, who is here, with us, in every moment of our brokenness.

In addition to this, our passage today also points towards something else. Because not only does Jesus experience the reality of this world, **He is also the hope of this world...**

Three times Matthew says that Jesus is fulfilling Scripture in what happens here. But Jesus is fulfilling these Scriptures in a different way to what we read in chapter one. There Jesus was fulfilling what was predicted, but here, Jesus and the events surrounding His birth are seen as fulfilling what already happened 1,000 years before. **In**

Matthew chapter 2, Jesus is seen as embodying once again the story of God's people, Israel, from long ago. In the Old Testament we read that Israel went down to Egypt to seek safety and they came back under God's protection. Likewise, Jesus finds safety among the Jewish colonies in Egypt, where His people numbered in the millions. Additionally, when the time was right, Father

God brought His son Jesus safely out of Egypt and to the promised land of Israel.

What is more, the sorrow that 10 to 30 families would have experienced because of Herod's actions, that sorrow is seen as echoing the sorrow Israel would have felt when families were scattered by the Babylonians as they took Israel into exile.

In each story, including the account of Jesus being a Nazarene, we are meant to see solidarity between the story of Jesus and the story of God's people and in that solidarity, find hope once more. Because when those families wailed at the time of exile, the prophet Jeremiah also spoke about how God would fulfil His promises and bring life out of death and hope amidst darkness. We are

meant to see in Jesus that He is the fulfilment of Israel's story and thus that hope is still alive, because Jesus is still alive. He is the promised Messiah...

and the mission He came to fulfil will not be thwarted, He will bring life and justice and peace, He will bring freedom, and so we can have hope because of Him.

Friends, this year has been so hard, and as we enter 2021 we face a future of tighter restrictions and questions about this new strain of the virus and still we wait for things to "go back to normal". It's essential to know that Jesus is with us in the struggles, but we need more than as well, we need hope, we need to know that hope is still alive. And it is alive, friends, because our Saviour is alive. He is with us, not only in stories from 2,000 years ago – but in the here and now, for the babe that came at

Christmas, grew to be a man, and yes He died upon a cross, but after 3 days, Father God raised Him from the dead, and so for 2,000 years this has been the testimony... and hope of the church: that Jesus conquered death, he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay, instead, Father God vindicated His sacrifice on the cross by raising Jesus to life.

Brothers and sisters, as we go into 2021, let us also look forward, look forward to a year in which Jesus will journey with us in every moment, in every season, in every high and low, because He is the Saviour who is Immanuel, God with us, for He is alive even today.

To help nurture this perspective, to help nurture this hope in us, I'd like to invite you to consider joining me in doing something this year.

It's my practice, to start my day by reading some Scripture and thinking about its meaning for myself. Often in those moments, God speaks, bringing hope, encouragement, sometimes a challenge. On the 1st of January, I am planning to begin reading through the whole of the New Testament again, rooting myself in the accounts of Jesus and the teaching passed on to us.

So, I'd like to invite you to consider doing this with me. Later today, we'll email out and put on our website a copy of this reading plan, and we'll also post a copy to those on our mailing list. The reading plan gives you something to read five days a week and then some questions to think about, as a means of meeting with God. **Because if we want to be a people** who keep our faith in Jesus, who have hope because of Jesus, and who know Jesus...

with us in our struggles, then the testimony of Christians across the ages is that we need to be regularly in the Scriptures. And maybe if we do this, and do this as a community, then we might also find support and encouragement from one another, and together, stay connected to Jesus, knowing that He is alive and journeying with us in all the struggles of life, not only in 2020 but forevermore.

I pray it may be so. Amen.