

## **Advent 2 – God is Dangerous**

December 4, 2016

### **Matthew 2: 1-12:**

*When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?" <sup>5</sup> They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, <sup>6</sup> 'Bethlehem in the land of Judea, you are very important among the towns of Judea. From your town will come a leader, who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.'" <sup>7</sup> Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. <sup>8</sup> He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too." <sup>9</sup> The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> They were thrilled and excited to see the star. <sup>11</sup> When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. <sup>12</sup> Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.*

[Play VIDEO – God is Dangerous.]



Tough video. First, picture yourself as one of the two ladies who were walking together. You stop at a stoplight, waiting to cross the street. Then you see her sitting there against the bridge support.

You look at your friend and raise an eyebrow. What are you thinking just then? What are you thinking as you look at her?



She looks up at you. You make eye contact. The light changes, the sign says, "Walk" and off you go. But you look back. You look again into her eyes. What are you thinking just then? What are you thinking as you look at her? What emotions churn?



Now flip the script. You are sitting under the overpass - cold, lonely, hungry. Your sign says, "Hungry, need help. God bless you." Two well-dressed, professional looking women walk up to the stop light. They notice you, but look



away quickly. They know you are there. They look back again, but turn away just as quickly as before. What are you thinking just then? What are you thinking as you look at them?

The light changes. One turns and begins to walk away quickly. The other hesitates. As she too walks away, she glances back for a moment, but then hurries to catch up to her friend. What are you thinking just then? What are you thinking as you look at them? What emotions churn? Tough video.





We do not have to watch that video or think about being one of the people in it for too long to see how God can be dangerous, do we? Thanks be to God that He is dangerous. Let us pray.

God has always been dangerous. In the beginning, out of the chaos, God created this world. In this creative process and ever since then, God has been working to bring order, peace, stability to this world, to our lives. But to do this, at times God has been dangerous. More precisely, God can call His people into dangerous situations. For example, in the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, and Jonah were called by God to do tasks that were dangerous and for which they felt ill-equipped. These calls required Abraham to leave home, Moses to return home, and Jonah to go to his enemies' home. God gave all of them the power and protection they needed to "carry out the difficult tasks they were called to do". Maybe you've heard the saying that "God doesn't call the equipped; God equips the called." Well, our Old Testament family members lived that saying! They offer us concrete proof of what God can do even when the circumstances are dangerous. They also offer witness as to what God can do for you and for me when we are willing servants, when we are willing to lay aside our prejudices and fears, to trust in God fully. It is then that God will lead us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

You may be thinking, "Why? Why would I follow a dangerous call? Why would I risk so much for God?" Reading from page 34 in *Under Wraps*, "From the beginning of time, God has been a mighty God, calling His children to stretch beyond what they are

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capable of on their own in order to restore His relationship with them. We need



to realize that putting ourselves at the mercy of God's dangerous call is actually the safest place of all, since it puts us in the middle of His perfect will". In the middle of His perfect will - sounds like a good place to be.



Throughout the Old Testament we have examples of people hearing the call, accepting the call, and the becoming faithful servants. Some were simple people like you and me. Some were kings. In Psalm 72 we read of the things the King is supposed to do: *"Let him be honest and fair with all your people, especially the poor. <sup>3</sup> Let peace and justice rule every mountain and hill. <sup>4</sup> Let the king defend the poor, rescue the homeless, and crush everyone who hurts them."* We may not be the King or the President. We may not hold any great position of authority. We may not be able to issue decrees or write writs to establish policy or define how society will function. But you and I are the kings of our own little realms. And maybe one afternoon, our kingdom will be on a street corner and someone will be sitting there. When we are waiting for the light to change, how will we wield the power that God has given us? Yes, God can be dangerous.

Jesus had a dangerous mission. Arriving unexpectedly, He wasn't kind of the Messiah that the people had hoped for. In our scripture today, we heard how



the wise men had traveled a great distance to visit the baby Jesus. King Herod was very worried when he learned they were searching for a king he knew nothing about. Herod gathered up those with knowledge of the prophecies to help

the wise men – and himself. *"They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote."* Then, sensing the danger that Jesus could be, Herod began to hatch a plan. *"Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too."*



Herod would go on to have all children under two years of age living in Bethlehem and the surrounding area killed. He feared this newborn king. He feared something that he did not even understand.



Jesus would grow up and would begin his ministry at about age 33. Jesus always taught with authority. The common, everyday people loved him. But the religious leaders, not so much. Like King Herod, the religious leaders feared Jesus because He threatened their power too. In his own loving way, Jesus turned religion on its head. He taught it was not about the Law, about following the rules. It was about loving God and loving neighbor. It was about living out the spirit of the Law, not the letter of the Law. It was about being in a relationship with God.

Jesus came to right the relationship between God and people that was initially severed when Adam and Eve turned away. It has been a relationship that God has been working on almost since the beginning of time. In Jesus, God's love and power were both revealed. At times, God's power can bring danger because God is not tame. God will do whatever it takes to save us, to save mankind. In

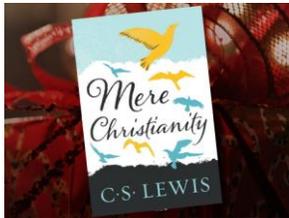
his book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis writes, "God is not quite safe. . . but he's good." There is much truth in this statement.



Jesus began his ministry by calling the disciples to leave everything and to follow him. They were summoned to a mission that would change the world. Last week we talked

about how God expects things to change in Advent – you, me, the world. During those three years of ministry, Jesus revealed how we are to live. During this time, He healed every spiritual, emotional, and physical need that came His way. The disciples would too. Their mission was exciting, but it also was dangerous. It cost them their jobs. It cost them their families. And it cost many of them their lives. For Jesus' disciples, following was dangerous.

Jesus calls out to us to follow as well. We, like the first disciples, are called. We initially want Jesus to come into our lives so that our lives are nicer, more comfortable. We want Jesus to look out for us, to protect us, to keep us safe. Yes, Jesus can and will do all of these things. But He wants more. He wants to go to work in our lives, reshaping us into His image. He does not want to simply bless our lives. Jesus wants to change our lives. When we allow Jesus into our heart, when we open that door of our hearts to Christ, He will do something bigger than we ever imagined. Jesus begins by restoring our lives, saving us from the evil powers of this broken world, freeing us from the power of sin and death. We all know from experience that this can be a hard process. We all also know that this is a continual process because we are human and we will never be perfect.



In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis borrows a parable from George MacDonald in writing of this work of God in us:

*"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."*

Jesus goes to work on us so that He can come and live in us. He does not simply want to visit from time to time. It is not always comfortable. It sometimes hurts *'abominably'*. It sometimes does not make any sense to us. But it makes sense to God. Jesus came to save us from our sins, to redeem us. He came to restore us and to make us fully into His image. In John 10:10, we read of Jesus' intent for our lives, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"*.



God's call pushes us out of our comfort zones, just as the disciples were pushed out of theirs. God wants to change our lives more than we are sometimes willing



to accept. For this reason, God is dangerous. God calls each of us to step out in faith, to trust fully in His will for our lives. So what does this look like for us this Advent season?

To frame that idea, a few questions from the end of Chapter Two. Is God calling you to step out of that comfort zone and to invite a friend or family member to church this Christmas Eve? Is God calling you to trust in the gifts He has given you to be a voice of hope and faith in your local school, your community, or your home? Is God calling you to come face-to-face with the need in your area: to minister to those who are homeless, to open your heart and home to a child in the foster care system, or to mentor a youth who doesn't have a father?

It is my hope and prayer that you and I will allow God to be dangerous this Advent season. May we all hear the clear call to be the light in someone's darkness and may we all be willing to say, "Yes, Lord, I will follow". Let us pray.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

1. Where might God be calling you? Where might God be calling our church?
2. What seems dangerous about the call you hear from God? What might be dangerous in the call God has for our church?
3. In what ways have you seen God's past faithfulness bring strength and protection to you? To your church?
4. When have you struggled with a whisper or nudge, like the two women in the opening video? How can you respond to the call the next time?