Sermon- 1st Sunday of Christmas 2019 Dec. 28-29

Texts Gal. 4:4-7, Matt 2:13-23

Title: “God Leads—We follow”

Prayer

Salutation

**Bridge**

**“He’s totally nuts!” “He believes he saw what?” These days, in our age of self-proclaimed intelligence, brought on by years of so-called higher education and technological marvels unknown before today, if we hear of anyone that says they have been visited by a celestial being what do we do? We laugh, sneer and make fun. Don’t we? Admit it! If I told you I had been visited by an angel of the Lord would you believe me? Some of you would think of me as crazy. Some of you probably already do! But, some of you would believe me, just because you know I take this call seriously. Others would do as the Word says and test the spirits after whatever the proclamation the Angel had made was true or not. But then let me ask you this, “Are we any different than anyone before us?”**

**No. We aren’t. In todays’ text Joseph has another dream. Since he had believed the first angel of God that had come to him, (although he may have questioned himself more than once) this was becoming routine for him. Because Mary had had experiences with Gabriel, she didn’t laugh at him nor think him crazy when he told her about the first dream with angels, (remember last Sunday in Matt. 1?) so why would she not believe him this time, when God, through the voice of a messenger, (“angelos” in the Greek), told him to take this child and wife, and flee to Egypt? This was a bit after the birth of Jesus and the wise men had come to worship. And now, because Herod was afraid of a rival to the throne, He sent his troops to kill Jesus and every male under the age of two. You could say that Herod, in his role as king, was totally “anti-Christ”. And he was an evil man. Even today, many are just like him and take innocent life. Murder in all forms around the globe makes us cringe when we hear about slaughter of the innocents like we have in the text today. And that, when the angel told Joseph to leave, would make anyone flee. No, Joseph was not crazy. He was led by God.**

**In fact, he was much like many of Israel before him where God led, and they followed-in faith. Look at Romans chapter four where Paul addresses this issue of Faith. All these patriarchs he mentions, followed God, by faith. And here, Joseph, in faith, believes God and does exactly as He says. Every single time. God Leads, Joseph follows.**

**Law**

**The patriarchs followed God by faith. And that faith was in the promise that God would send His Son to save the world from its sin. To finally bring to fruition that verse in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” And Joseph, being a righteous man of the house of David, understood and knew of this. It was being fulfilled right before his very eyes. And God had placed this responsibility upon his shoulders. The situation had gone from crazy to reality. Here in his arms, Joseph was to hold his Savior from sin. And he knew it. Just like Simeon had known it when they took Him to the temple on His eighth day on the earth. The Lord was to live like all other men of the tribe of Israel- believing and participating in the promise by circumcision. What irony! What complete and total perfection in the Lord’s plan! That a sinless man would die to save the sinful. But here in Joseph’s care was One such as this. And Joseph knew that he, a sinner, must carry on what God asked, that sin would finally be destroyed in God’s plan for mankind.**

**But he had to act quickly. This dream told of another plan, the plan of Satan and his servant Herod, who would try to wipe out the Savior and the promise before it were to come about. Satan has long range goals. And this was one of those plans to try to subvert the plan of God to deliver us sinners! And God told Joseph and Joseph followed. God would not allow Satan to destroy His Son and His plan! God said, “Flee!”**

**I wonder if God told him that we would be included in that plan? If Joseph knew there would be countless generations of sinners that would come after him that would need to be forgiven? He knew about himself and all those before him, but what about us? God only knows, but he, by faith, trusted God to get it done for every single one of us, even though he would never see it for himself. For like Simeon, we don’t see anything about him in the scriptures after they return to Nazareth. For Joseph it’s a dead end. Was his faith accounted to him as righteousness? Under the old covenant, most certainly so. Because the promise is for all who believe. When God leads, we follow.**

**We need to follow him out of our sin, because we can’t crawl out of a pit that only takes us deeper every time, and we try to dig ourselves out. We can’t do it and the Spirit leads us. Every expert sinner would agree with me. You do, don’t you? We’re all experts! And everyone that examines themselves truthfully knows they need help. Only God can do that with sin. And Jesus said, “Follow me”, to Joseph and to us. Because Jesus knew how “life” just happens. The proverbial “crap” hits the fan in our lives every day, doesn’t it? Death and destruction come in some way, shape or form, to ruin our lives and make us lose faith. For example, on Christmas Day, the seminarian I have been supporting in Uganda- died. This future servant of the Word, with only six months left of his education, just- died. And he has left behind five kids and his widow. And it hits us right in the face that life is a sinful mess and death lurks behind us every day, whether we know it or not. The innocents certainly didn’t know it and their parents didn’t either, and we are horrified by the evil.**

**Gospel**

**In our modern society, all of this sounds crazy doesn’t it? A fairy tale! They say, “Dream on!” This! This Bible! It’s all a made-up story for people that out of insecurity, just *have to* believe in something other than themselves and their own capabilities. But this flight to Egypt was what *God does* here. His long-held plans in His Word, in Christ to save us. Long before this, He took eight people in an ark that mankind would be saved. Then, He led Israel out of Egypt that the promise may be kept at a later date. And the Patriarchs all believed this by faith. And here, because Joseph followed God’s words, the Promise rode with His parents to Egypt so that the promise would not be spoiled by a madman that would destroy Him. So, you can see that our salvation was secure in God leading Joseph, Mary and His Son away from harm.**

**And God does that for us as well. This is Good News! By the Holy Spirit He sanctifies us and leads us to completion in Jesus. Growing in the faith that He put in us to bring us to faith in the first place! He saved us by washing and the Word. He gave us His body and blood to feast upon at His table. He died, bearing our sin when He knew no sin. And He rose again, promising that He would call us out of death that we may be with Him forever! What does the Epistle say? “When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” That- is the Good News and He has done every bit of it for us. We can’t do it at all. And we know it. So, when God says follow, in faith, God leads, and we follow. It is our joyous response to a faithful God. Just like Joseph.**

**Conclusion**

**When Joseph was finally told in a dream that Herod had died and it was time for them to go to Nazareth, he probably was relieved. He had that nagging feeling that there was a possibility that Herod could pounce on them at any time, and it probably kept him on edge. I know it would have me. I would have had an eye out for trouble every day. But God didn’t let him down and He sent the angel to say the coast would be clear if he went up to Nazareth and avoided Herod’s son. So, this he did. He followed God and believed in His promise of His Son. What satisfaction it must have given him to finally go back to Nazareth, resume his vocation and watch Jesus grow. Like all of us, He did his duty. He let God do the rest. That’s what we do. We believe and follow. That path is here. In His Word. God may not send an angel to keep you on it. Then again, in tough cases He may! But when He does not, keep this close to you. Come here and hear Him speak to you. Taste of the feast to come- here. And follow Him to the feast of the Lamb.**

**In whose name we pray, Amen!**