

Sermon Series: Scandalous Christmas

December 1, 2024

Midnight runaway

Prepare.to.Take.the.Unexpected.Road

TDN.Midnight.Runaway.[https://youtu.be/4ePCDKouNf0?si=TO6ETiqU070fXcZ\(](https://youtu.be/4ePCDKouNf0?si=TO6ETiqU070fXcZ(0-0:25)

[0-0:25 Walk.on_stage.with.backpack.](#)

Starting a new sermon series – Scandalous Christmas from now until Christmas...We often talk about the best stories of Christmas, the pretty scenes of nativity, but what about the back roads of Jesus life. Today's sermon is Midnight Runaway. Expect and prepare to take the unexpected road when following Jesus.

Okay, the tune, How many of you know that tune? Midnight Runaway , performed by the musical group 3 Dog Night; was partly an inspiration for naming this sermon. Have heard them in concert and met at least two of their original members, one of whom has been a long-time resident of Modesto- Mike Allsup, Lead guitarist. Also, one of the first musical groups that inspired me in drumming plus they had interesting relevant lyrics in a dark troubling time in the late 1960s.

How many of you have ever had to make an unexpected trip. A Midnight run? Aside from potty stops – a few stick out in my mind. Unexpected trips to the ER at midnight?

I recall a midnight run to the border. Serena and I on vacation in Arizona, PG with Summer at or about 12:00am “I’m hungry. . . a lack of food for a pregnant woman – not a good idea – Made a run to the border taco bell – good planning. **PICTURE Taco Bell**

This time of year many of us will travel during Christmas. We may already have a destination in mind. What about that first Christmas? We are pretty familiar with the first part of the Christmas story, Joseph and Mary traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem with child, the birth in the manger, the angels, the shepherds, the magi. But what about after the manger? What happens next? What about the other trip, the unexpected trip?

Invite up Micaela Meyer

Read Matt 2 – Micaela Meyer

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi ^a from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” ^b”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

¹³ 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 so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” ^c

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,

weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.” ^d

This is not the story of the trip to Bethlehem, that was indeed a challenging trip. This is the other trip. An unexpected trip - the midnight run away to Egypt.

We sometimes have to take those trips, unexpected, often painful, these are the trips that grow us and define us.....

Pray

God.Gives.Us.the.Direction.We.Need. So.Take.it*

Matt. 2:13-15:

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.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” ^e (Hosea 11:1)

Joseph and Mary had quite a month. Census taken, baby born in a stable, copious visitors We have the Son Of God, so what can go wrong? Joseph, trying to get a decent nights rest has a dream “Get up and get out!” – escape on the midnight run to Egypt. – “what God are you kidding?” I just wanted a nice Jewish wedding instead I have a wife and a baby, your Son, and now our baby boy is on the “most wanted” list.”

Picture of the Mary, Joseph and Jesus with donkey <https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9XqjruwrHH0/WkfRGoE5AII/AAAAAAAAZXk/y68yjJH7uTwXrd4itfRvsjM8DmOQR7ujwCLcBGAs/s1600/Story02.PNG>

What was traveling like back then, what are some similar logistical issues traveling with a toddler at night? (I’m hungry, I tired) How many have traveled with a toddler? Landscape; ever see pictures of the scenery of southern Israel and Gaza (have a photo). You have seen pictures of Gaza on TV. In first century, it was desolate – it was and still is a desert, sand and rock. Nighttime travel; who travels at midnight in 1st century? Did you know we have over 12,000 streetlights in Modesto- every block has one. No street lights in Gaza. Traveling at night is difficult, disorienting and potentially hazardous. Simply cannot see the end of your destination.

What would be on your mind traveling to Egypt as a Jew in the 1st century?

We have travelled before, but not to Egypt. Am I on the right road? how many miles before I have to fill up this donkey again; we won't know anyone; will our people accept us? How will I provide for my wife and child.

Where do we go and where do we stay? "Joseph, I hear Alexandria is beautiful this time of year, shall I book it on Priceline?" Less than 100 miles as crow flies from Bethlehem to an Egyptian border town; longer to the Nile delta and Alexandria. Historians claim many Jews lived in Alexandria and also at a closer Jewish outpost in the Nile Delta.

Optional: Interesting parallels but just that...

- Miriam hides baby Moses in the Nile in Egypt (Exodus 2) because Pharaoh was killing all the Hebrew boys.
Joseph and Mary hides Jesus in Egypt perhaps in that same region of the Nile, because Herod was killing Hebrew boys in Bethlehem.
- Moses, years later frees the captive Israelites and leads them to the Promised Land.
Jesus returns to Nazareth (Promised Land) to free the captives on Calvary.

Many other parallels of Moses and Jesus

Well, like Joseph we get the direction we need from God not necessarily what we want. Part of Joseph's next step follow God by faith. He gives us the next step but not necessarily the full itinerary step by step. God has a next step for you.

Shepherds given an angel

Magi a star

Joseph was given a dream

He has given you His Spirit and His written Word and the wisdom of others

God gives us the direction we need – so take it.

God.is.not.surprised.by.our.unexpected

This was trip was unexpected by the travelers, but not unexpected to God. His prophet Hosea spoke about this centuries earlier. I qf "ku"pq'uwtr tkugf "d{"qwt"ektewo ucpegu or wpgzr gevgf "/"

Family Story

Our family traveled from Tucson AZ to Oklahoma City every Christmas. 16 hour trip one way. Our vehicle broke down a few miles between Lordsburg , New Mexico and hell on our 2005 Christmas vacation. It happened about midnight. Summer, our forementioned 18 year old Taco Bell-birther daughter was driving. Then suddenly we heard this loud drum beating sound from our engine. Dad! What do I do? slowly keep going until we find an exit.

Within a mile out of nowhere and exit appeared took us to a place called the Shady Grove truck stop - s missing. **PICTURE OF SHADY GROVE.** Within an hour a quasi mechanic disassembled the console of our van and diagnosed the problem. engine blew out a spark plug. He said he could fix it, and then he couldn't. Here we are stuck in a dark cold desert, no vehicle, no motel. Serena called a friend in Tucson and her husband volunteered to pick us up drove this home at 3:00 AM. 5hour roundtrip. God sent us an unlikely Angel named Kevin came and got us and took us home.

What are some unexpected roads you have not wanted to want to travel? The ones that were not of your own choosing?

God is not surprised by our unexpected, whether it is a lonely road in New Mexico;

a loss in the family, depression, cancer, political and economic circumstances, physical and mental illness that will not mend, injustice, disabilities.

He is there with us. **J g"ku'vj g"l QF"VJ CV'VTCXGNU"Y WJ"WU**

Joseph and Mary had no reservation at Holiday inn
had no destination in mind
did not know where the next meal was coming from
had not traveled this road
God is not surprised by our unexpected.

He is the GOD that is with you on you journey

That.said;iii.

Traveling.with.Jesus.has.a.cost..

What about the circumstances occurring in Bethlehem while Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus are in Egypt.

Matt 2:16

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Why was Herod so upset? Trick by the Magi? No far deeper, darker.

V. 2 "Where is the one who has.been.born.King of the Jews." Asked the Magi. Not, where is the baby that will grow up to a King, literally where is the King now. This hit Herod stone cold, because there can only be one King in a Kingdom and Herod had no desire to worship this King.

By contrast the Magi had come to worship THE King.

Then Herod's men stormed unannounced into Bethlehem and systematically murdered all boys between birth and 2 years old. We don't know the exact number of babies and toddlers lost. Bethlehem at that time was a small insignificant village commercially and historically (save City of David).

But even if less than 100 or 50, can you hear mourning and weeping? Can you feel the loss of that community?

Consequences of knowing and following Jesus has a cost.

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **23** and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Time came to travel back to Israel. God gave direction to Joseph via angel in a dream. Redirected his path to Nazareth – but not through Bethlehem. Again Joseph followed the direction given him.

You have traveled some rough roads, some unexpected trips – perhaps detours that seem endless. Perhaps there are rough roads ahead you are avoiding or at least delaying. Have you had to travel back to Egypt or still trying to escape it.

Personal story- retired from city management seven years ago. the plan was to enter church ministry part time and enjoy grandkids for the rest of the time. Ministry here began in 2018. We started experiencing incredible growth thus the need to expand all of our facilities. So began the unexpected road of construction manager, then covid- then tent Master, then repurpose the plans, then compound fractures/concussion and then 3 months later – heart attack. In a zombie state for over 6 months....Did not know if I would ever be able to hike with Serena again; did not know if I would ever do speaking or preaching again. I did not even have the strength to go on stage for more than a few minutes. Could have said "enough" "uncle" or simple go back to Oklahoma and spend time with the Grandkids. Took some time off, prayed a lot, rehab seriously, negotiated with doctors. God didn't just heal me, he restored my health and endurance back to what it was 20 years ago. The same week I returned from my time off, was the same week our Lead Pastor announced his resignation.

Following Jesus will likely lead you down a difficult and even painful roads. A road with unexpected turns, stopovers and destinations. You on one of those right now? ones you may not like or be comfortable with. God may or may not make it go away. He is travelling with you.

Our savior knows those roads. Once His mission was completed, He offered His life for you and me on a place call Gogotha, less than six miles from Bethlehem.

There is a cost when following Jesus.

He has traveled unexpected and painful roads since childhood.

Unexpected roads and unsure destinations. How do we prepare for the unexpected?

PREPARE*.For.the.unexpected

When Serena and I go on a road trip or a hike, we prepare for the unexpected.

Here is my backpack I take everywhere. I encourage you to take one as well.

1. **Navigation.** my compass - Holy Spirit, God's WORD
compass for Pastor appreciation Month. Listen to Him – He is there along side you
2. **Pack plenty of food and water.** Daily devotions in prayer with the Bread of life and Living water. Talk to HIM – he is there along side you.
3. **Share you location and experiences with others**– never go alone
4. **Embrace the Road** – no matter the journey- take notes , will make you stronger for the next journey

What got me through my difficult road these last 3 years??? THIS, THIS got me through...not the backpack, its contents....

The good news? I have taken you on a bit of a dark road today. THE GOOD NEWS

God gives his people direction. To the shepherds, He gave an angel, to the Magi, he gave a star; to Joseph a dream; to Mary a promise, to the people of Israel, His word, spoken and written by the prophets, and to the world a King and Savior. You and I still have His Word and His promises; He is our Savior and King, but

He has given you His Spirit to guide you and comfort you? not necessarily to take away your Herods!

I don't think I fully understood that until I had to take an unexpected road • j.

Expect the unexpected but God is not surprised by your unexpected. He will be traveling with you in this road .Journey with him and follow his ways but know that Following Jesus has a cost. He will be there travelling alongside to faithfully guide you. Prepare for the unexpected, he has supplied the equipment you need.

How are you preparing for the unexpected road ahead?

picture from Road less travelled blog

Pray