

“GOD’S DIVINE PLAN”
Sunday, December 30, 2007
Gates Presbyterian Church
Don Mullen, Commissioned Lay Pastor Student Intern

Matthew 2:13-23; Isaiah 63:7-9; Hebrews 2:10-18

The presents are unwrapped, the trees are coming down, family and friends are returning home, and back off to work we go. As life gets back to some sort of normalcy let us not forget to take with us the hope, peace, joy, and love of this season. Let us not forget the feelings and emotions we experienced leading up to and during Christmas. The anticipation, joy, relief, excitement and hope of the season. If we carry these same feelings with us throughout the coming year how many lives could we have an impact on? What plans does God have for us? In my four months here I have gotten to know many of you through Bible Study, Worship Service, and other congregational events. A feeling of hope seems to surround this church and its people. An underlying theme of the church, hope, seems to be in our mission work, sermons, Bible study and in our everyday conversations.

Hope is expressed throughout the New Testament. Matthew brings the Gospel to us to by connecting the Old Testament to the New because of his emphasis on fulfillment of prophecy. His purpose was to present the clear evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, the savior. From Moses to Abraham to David to Joseph and the birth of Jesus, God had a plan.

God directed all the events taking place so that the Savior would be protected from his enemies and be in a place God planned for him. As God directed Joseph, he is also calling all people to do the hard thing. What if an angel of the Lord came to us in a dream and directed us to do something so profound? Could we do the hard thing? Would we have enough faith and belief to act? God does talk to us everyday when we read the bible, but are we listening? Joseph was a man of integrity and strong belief. A descendant of David, he was Jesus legal and earthly father. The Old Testament tells us that the one to come would be a descendant of David and that this king would be born in Judea, in Bethlehem.

God had a plan, and not even Herod could stifle it. In fact, Herod (the authority), not knowing, even added to the plans being laid out. First, in Luke chapter 2, a census was to be taken and all to return to their own towns to register. Therefore Joseph took Mary and went to Bethlehem, the city of David to be registered. This was to fulfill prophecy. Secondly, the magi did not report back to Herod once seeing the child and as directed went home by another route, and this angered Herod and he ordered the killing of the children. Before this took place Joseph took the child and his mother and fled to Egypt as directed by the Lord. This fulfilled the prophecy from Hosea 11:1 “I called my Son out of Egypt”. This is affirmation that God does have a plan and comes to us in all the evil of the same world that Christ came into.

A quick story:

A family I have been real close to has been dealing with the decision of doing the hard thing. A man, his wife, and daughter a couple of years ago took in a teenage girl and soon thereafter adopted her. This young lady I’ll call Mary, came from a broken home without a father figure

and a mother with some unhealthy habits. Soon after the adoption they found the wife was pregnant with another daughter. All of a sudden the household went from three to five people and the whole dynamics changed. Because of her upbringing, Mary had some issues and problems the family could not have anticipated. They felt that it wasn't a good family blend with Mary and the baby so they decided they were going to put her in foster care. **Now God's plan, being called to do the hard thing.** His Parents (Mary's adopted Grandparents), being of strong faith, belief, and moral integrity, could not imagine having Mary fall back into the system so they invited her to come live with them. This has caused a lot of conflict, struggle, and strife in the family, but through all this conflict and struggle the grandparents stand firm in the belief that this is what is best for Mary. They are now the legal guardians of Mary. Mary is a very good, honest young lady who now is told everyday she is loved, they read the bible, and she attends church. It has been a blessing to the grandparents as they now have someone to help around the house and keep them company. Mary has found a home.

God is in charge. You can feel safe when you are living with the hope of God's promise. That's not to say there won't be struggles along the way, but God is in charge! Everything that happened in the Christmas story was planned out by God.

You can see God's hand not only in every step of the Christmas story but also in this personal story. Our detours are God's straight lines. Is this God's plan? All along is like this is where Mary belongs, every aspect in her life leading up until now has just been detours.

Christ is with us in our journey just as he was with Joseph and Mary. There is a divine plan for each and every one of us. Do we recognize it or are we always looking for plan "B" instead? We have been given free will, to act, think, and respond on our own. What if Joseph, after seeing the angel decided; you know I really should leave but I am working on a couple things right now and the timing just isn't right yet, let me finish up what I am doing and then we'll be on our way. Joseph had free will, but he chose the route of the Divine Plan. Joseph was a righteous and faith-filled man. Joseph was sensitive to God's guidance and willing to do God's will no matter what the consequences. Do we recognize God's guidance, care, and love; or are we just trying to figure it all out on our own?

As a youngster, I attended the United Church of Christ in Morganville. As a teenager we moved to a neighboring town we got disconnected from that church and lost touch. Fast forward; I met Barb, my wife and we got married in her home church, Covington United Presbyterian Church. We were casual attendees until our oldest son had to fulfill a religious badge for scouts. We started attending church on a regular basis and fell in love with the people and the pastor. Since then, I have been called to be a Trustee, Elder, Clerk of Session and been a participant in the worship services. Today my calling has brought me here, to be a reflection of hope to everyone here. God has a plan, and yes I veered away at times and not been conscious of His works, but He isn't done with me yet. My mentor, teacher, Ralph came to you from the U.C.C. and now leads worship here in the Presbyterian Church in Gates. As a youth I come from the U.C.C. and now lead you in Worship today. Of all the pastors I could have been teamed up with, here I am! Coincidence or plan?

Christ is a human reflection of God to the world just as we are an expression of God in the world. Is our reflection of the same light as Jesus? Moses invited and led God's people out of Egypt, and as directed Joseph brought the child and his mother out of Egypt to the land of Israel. Jesus is leading us, inviting us to follow the Lord out of the land of despair, oppression, and sin into the land of hope and peace.

God's plan to reconcile the world through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is an ongoing endeavor. Is today's society disconnected from God? Who are we listening to? People today claiming materialism and money is good. (On the Today show they had a story of a sixty-year skier getting hit and run over by a twelve-year-old skier. As he laid there with a shoulder injury he is not only cussing out the boy and his father, but in his next breath he is saying "I am going to sue you.") Are people today afraid of losing their place, power, and taking advice from non-credible sources? Herod felt threatened by a child, betrayed by the magi, so he reacted in horrid, violent way. Herod was an evil man; he let his greed, love of power, and selfishness control his actions. The message here is that through history many atrocities have taken place but Herod's reactions affirm to us that God comes to us in all the evil of the world that Christ came into. In our reading from Matthew 2 verse 18, the prophet speaks of a cry of anguish and despair. Jesus comes in the midst of all that to rescue us. In Isaiah 63, the message is "Praise for deliverance". From this reading in Isaiah it reads "And he became their Savior. In all their suffering he also suffered, and personally rescued them. In His love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them and carried them through all the years." The prophet spoke of the Savior coming as our protector, rescuer, and redeemer.

In Hebrews we read that "Because God's children are human beings- made of flesh and blood- Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form." God's plan was to send Jesus as human, as a person who we can relate to, whose path we can follow.

Jesus was born in obscurity among the lowly shepherds. From the time of his birth he was a marked man carrying the burdens of others. Joseph's role as protector, caretaker, and guardian of the Christ Child can tend to go unnoticed. As Joseph protected this fragile package we must also be guardians of the truth, guardians of the good news. We are but one generation away from the word being lost. Can we be courageous like Joseph, as he was the earthly protector of Jesus, can we protectors of the word? We must protect this fragile package.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we actually started to practice and live the things we hear and sing about at Christmas? Wouldn't it be great if we took that spirit with us throughout the coming year? What if through our living in the word we changed lives around us? What an example of God's truth we could become. Where is our place in God's plans? Let's keep our detours to a minimum and see what awesome things God has in mind for us. Christ's light can lead the way to so much hope and promise.

Let us pray. Gracious God, may our paths be illuminated by your light. Be with us as we go from here to be guardians of your word and truth. Let us be ever conscious of all the wonderful things you have in store for each and every one of us. Amen.