



©2022 Ginger Hertenstein Conley  
SERMON TITLE: **God's Business is Life, Not Death**  
SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 2:13-20**  
DATE **December 11, 2022 Advent Three**  
Online service at [www.fpcd.org/live](http://www.fpcd.org/live)

*Read Matthew 2:13-20 (below) and then read the sermon.*

**W**e are so grateful for a church who involves children in its worship service. Thank you to our Sunday School teachers and musicians who teach these children, and parents who bring them. This is God's command, and that command ensures that faith in God, a lifestyle of goodness, and a culture with a moral and ethical compass carries on from generation to generation.

Today we celebrate our children as they tell the story of the birth of Christ. Yet part of that story exposes a diabolical decision by a diabolical king. Herod's action was one of the worst murders in the Bible. But Herod murdered two of his own sons. So he had no problem wielding the sword against his citizens.

However, we must note that before this evil king could execute his evil orders, God was way ahead. God knows Herod wants to destroy Jesus, and so as soon as the wise men leave God jumps to action. An angel of the Lord appeared with instructions to Joseph.

Both Joseph and Mary must respond to messages from angels.

The instructions were for them to flee to Egypt until "I tell you." These were direct heavenly instructions.

Jeremiah prophesied about the threat against Jesus. If God knew about Jesus' life years in advance, **God knows about your life.** God knows what events will come your way and God will steer you in the right direction.

Are you listening? Are you reading Scripture so you can learn how to follow? Heavenly advice always honors Jesus.

Mary and Joseph each did their part. Mary said "yes" to the angel though she did not understand how it would be done. Joseph agreed with the angel not divorce her. He protected her and helped her when she had the baby, named him Jesus as instructed, and moved his family from place to place as God directed.

That's a pretty brave thing to do.

God's plans for our good involve us. It takes active involvement on our part. Part of our living in heaven's will involves us. We "turn" toward God.

- ✓ We believe God and God rewards us.
- ✓ We act on what we believe.

- ✓ We risk obedience, and we experience the power of God in our lives.

Joseph and Mary devoted themselves to the life of Jesus, and God's astounding plan of salvation unfolded.

God helps situations that seem impossible. This is true for you and me, and even collectively for churches. Are you praying for First Presbyterian?

God comes through when you do. Last week, four days before our Christmas Concert, it was inadvertently canceled! For twenty-four hours we were praying—and looking for another venue! But overnight, **GOD CAME THROUGH.** The decision was reversed and the concert came off without a hitch.

### **GOD IS GOOD!**

First Presbyterian has to listen for and follow God in the same way that Joseph and Mary did. When you see an active church on the corner of Wheatland and Freeman, you should say to yourself, **That's a Powerhouse.** Do you feel powerful? Or lost in the crowd?

You be the bright and shining star proclaiming the power of God to save. First Presbyterian has to devote itself to protecting the life and message of Jesus.

God's business is life, not death.

The Bible points to other times when babies were subject to death. Numerous times in this world babies have been a threat to people.

Jesus was a threat to Herod because he was the coming Messiah, the King of the Jews.

The babies of the Israelites became a threat to Egypt's Pharaoh because the Israelites were becoming more numerous and powerful that the people of Egypt. So Pharaoh became ruthless against them, ordering the infant boys to be killed as they were born. (Ex 1:15-17) But when Pharaoh took such a terrible stance, God inspired the midwives to save the babies' lives. Scripture even records the names of two of them:

But the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah . . . feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and demanded, "Why have you allowed the boys to live?" [They made up an excuse.] So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. (Ex 1:15-20)

Even when Pharaoh commanded all his people to throw all the male babies into the Nile, Moses's parents refused. (Ex 2:1-4)

Many years later, the Babylonian army which came against Israel was ruthless against helpless babies and showed no mercy as they killed them. (Isaiah 13:18) But God told the surviving families in exile this:

"Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:6).

God's business is life not death.

Nations in today's world strike a blow against babies, sometimes even up until birth often because they are not welcome in the womb of the mother; or for financial reasons, or timing, or partner related reasons, or the need to focus on other children.

But Christians are called to protect life because it is God's way.

How do you do it? You allow yourselves to fall in love with Jesus, just like new parents do when they have a baby. You take a risk of faith.

Rejoice in that! How wonderful to live in this world and see the grace of God at work to help us and to save us and to love us.

We sometimes feel foolish to talk to people about Jesus. Or we do not think Jesus is powerful enough to overcome our difficulties. Or we lack courage. When that is the case, remember, Herod is long gone. But he is known for one of the most horrific crimes in history.

Be assured, Jesus is still here and at work.

We must teach our children so that his message not only saves them, but brings great goodness to babies and children around the world. God's business is life, not death.

What a blessing to be a part of God's salvation for the world.

AMEN

## Matthew 2:13-20

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt." Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A cry was heard in Ramah -- weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead." When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead."