

## Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

Jesus came and Herod was frightened - Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

And when Herod heard this, he was frightened. That has always somewhat amazed me. Herod, a merciless king known to have killed more than one of his own children for fear that as they were maturing they might get the idea of killing him and taking over the throne, is afraid of a baby that was being born.

You know that even if Jesus was destined to be the king of Israel and take Herod's place it would have been at least 13-15 years. The odds were pretty good to my way of thinking that Herod might not have even been alive then. Herod feared change.

How could a new king be born and yet him still stay in power? What would happen to him? Would a new king mean exile or death or some horrible personal crisis for him? Life was good like it was, why should Herod be interested in or accepting of change? But one of the realities of life is that when Jesus comes, change happens!

When Jesus enters a life, that life is changed. When Jesus was born into Herod's day, Herod's community would change. When you look at the last days of the life of Jesus you find that what the religious leaders feared the most was that if the people accepted Jesus, their lives, the religious leaders would change.

Change is tough and generally unwanted. Herod knew how he had been king up until the wisemen's arrival. If this new baby was to be the new king, it would mean his life would change. Ceasing to be king when that was all he had ever done would be through.

Change is tough and generally unwanted. Less you think that what has been happening recently with Linda does not weigh upon my mind I want to share about some changes that are happening.

Saturday night before Christmas Linda had a seizure that required rescue to rush her to the hospital. She would remain unconscious until Thursday after Christmas. She had a second seizure in the emergency room that evening. On the following morning we learned that the seizures were the result of two bleeds in the front of her head. The neuro surgeon let us know that the next 48 hours would be critical. What he was hoping for was no additional damage.

Because of being with other stroke patients from my churches I knew what he was saying is that if in the next 48 hours there was no new bleed the chances of recovery were vastly improved. But by the same token any additional bleeds or brain damage could indicate a great likelihood of severe damage or death.

2 additional strokes (back of her head) – first two had been bleeds in the front. Life or death???

Now suffers from some partial blindness (limited vision). Permanent, repairing or fully restored?

Dizziness that irritates headaches? From the medication or the strokes? Restorable or not.

Most frustrating of all...the time table. It could be weeks or a couple of months or maybe a year or more.

But what I really want us all to think about this morning as we embark upon new times, a new year, new relationships within our families, new service structure and times here at church is that God still controls it all. God is still in charge. Herod thought he could be in charge. He could call the shots. He would be the one to make the final decrees. When he faced the possibility that it was not true he feared.

Change is hard and unwanted most of the time. But when God allows us to walk with Jesus Christ we need to walk unafraid. I have no idea if Linda will regain her sight, whether the dizziness of the last week will fade or if some new strokes await us in the future. But with all my being I want to trust God. I do not want to become Herod. I do not want to live in fear. I do not want to live trusting only in what I know.

God knew the right time to bring Jesus into the world. Herod's fear did nothing but keep him from following and knowing God better. Herod's fear kept him from walking in partnership and in the companionship of God. Herod's hurt those around him.

God knows the right time for whatever healing will take place with Linda. God knows the valley you now walk through. Marital problems, new jobs, children who are wandering, spouse whose lives still hang in the balance or whose lives have already been altered in hard ways. Where you are walking, God is there and knows today. But the best is that God also knows tomorrow. God knows the peaks you are still to see. God knows the future to which we are called as God's church at St. Paul.

What I dream for each of us is that we find a way to rest in God. That we learn to find the wind of the spirit of God and be confident that wherever that wind blows us is exactly where God is waiting to bless us some more.

I have dreaded these days in waiting for whatever healing God will bring for Linda. But something that has amazed me during this time is my sleep. Often when facing change or struggle I find nights are restless. But for the last two weeks as I have laid my head down on the pillow at night I know God is in control and that God is taking care of everything in my life.

I have slept through most nights without even rising until the alarm goes off. I have known the blessing of trusting in God. Herod fear change. His life was filled with misery and the people around him suffered because of his fear. I pray for each of us during seasons of change the confidence to trust God even when the path is still unclear or the way uncertain.

When Jesus comes into a life, change happens. Change is almost always frightening and unwanted, but with Christ as our partner we are never alone. We walk with the author of all change and all life.

Let us pray.

Lord as St. Paul faces the change of services later this month and all that still remains uncertain help us to walk closely with Jesus knowing that God is in charge. Help us to live past fear that it might not destroy us or damage the lives of those near to us and your church. May we become the kind of church who is always confident in nothing except that God walks with us through and in the midst of everything. May each individual know the presence of the spirit that bring confidence in God and removes all fear, in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.