

TAKE THE CHILD!

Matthew 2:13-18

1st Sunday After Christmas

December 30, 2012

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In our home, when our kids were growing up, we had a joke about how specific Kim has needed to be about certain things with our children. For example, at mealtime or before they practiced the piano, they were often instructed, “Wash your hands...with soap!”

Or when they took a shower, “Don’t forget to wash your hair...with shampoo!” Or when they went to piano or violin lessons, “Make sure that you take your music with!”

This was a joke in our home because these instructions seem to be redundant. I mean, isn’t it obvious that if you’re washing your hands you should use soap, or that you would need to have your music along at piano lessons?

But then, when the follow up question was asked, it is amazing the numbers of times one had to go back and wash with soap, or had to run in from the car to get their music.

Now as one who often goes downstairs to get something and then can’t remember why I went in the first place, I guess I’m not one to talk. As redundant as something might seem, it is still good to be reminded.

In our Scripture lesson from Matthew 2 it is interesting that Joseph is told by the angel two different times to, “take the child and his mother.” The first time he is told to “take the child and his mother” and flee to Egypt, to get out of the country since Herod was searching to kill the baby Jesus. And the second time, after Herod’s death, the angel tells Joseph to “take the child and his mother” and go back to the land of Israel.

But talk about redundant! Can you imagine Joseph being told to go and yet having him leave Jesus, and Mary, behind? Can you imagine Joseph packing up, getting down the road, and then realizing, “Oh, I left my baby behind!” But for whatever reason the angel was very specific, “take the child. Don’t leave him behind. Make sure he is in your care and protection.”

And on this last Sunday of 2012, as we prepare to celebrate this week the coming of another New Year this same message, I believe, comes to us to “take the child.” Take Jesus with us. The message is to not leave him behind in the manger or put him back on the shelf with the rest of the decorations. The message is to make sure that we take him with.

Now granted, this may seem redundant since we know that Jesus has promised to be with us always and that he walks with us everyday. And this is, of course, the true message of Christmas, that he is Emmanuel God with us. But the tragic thing, even though Jesus has promised to be with us, is how many of us live each day like we don’t even know who he is.

Many of us, even though we claim to be Christians, live each day like we don't know him at all. Even though we just sang during this Christmas season that Jesus is the prince of peace and love, we often go back to our old ways of carrying grudges or seeking revenge.

Even though we sang and proclaimed that Jesus is our Savior, that he has forgiven and saved us from our sins, we often live each day as though that doesn't matter at all. We often continue committing the same sins we know are wrong, not even trying to change or find forgiveness and new life.

Even though we sang and proclaimed that we are to "Go, tell it on the mountain!"—go tell everyone about Jesus and his love—we often act as if we don't know him. We often live in such a way that no one would ever be able to tell that Jesus is part of our lives. We sing the words, but then don't tell anyone about the message of Jesus and his love.

So the message of the angel for you and me today is that we are to "take the child." Take the child, Jesus, into our hearts by faith and commit our lives to him. We are to take Jesus into our lives in such a way that he changes and renews us.

We are to allow him to fill us with his love and forgiveness in such a way that he permeates our very being. We are to take Jesus into our lives in such a way that his love, and joy, and truth shines forth from us in all we do.

Take the child, my dear friend! Take Jesus into your heart. Believe in him. Trust in him. Allow him to fill you with his Spirit and you will never be the same again! Don't leave him back in the manger, or in the programs and festivities, but take Jesus with you as your Savior and Lord.

As you may be heading back to school or college this week, take the child. Take the child, Jesus, and be aware of the fact that he goes with you in your classes and relationships. May you know his presence, may you rely on him for help and support, and may you be a positive example and witness for him each day.

As you may be facing uncertainties with your health, or with your job, or with financial worries and concerns, take the child. Take the child, Jesus, and know that he is with you, and loves you, no matter what may come. Take Jesus with you and realize that he has the power to heal, that he gives strength and guidance when we turn to him.

And for our church here at Messiah, as we enter into the exciting new year of 2013 the message of the angel is to take the child. Take the child Jesus and remember that this is his church. It is not my church, or your church, or our denomination's church—it is Christ's church. Take the child, Jesus, and remember to give him the glory in everything we do here at Messiah.

And as we enter this new year and the fact that each one of us may face the reality this next year of the death of a loved one or friend, or even our own death, take the child. Take the child, Jesus, and remember that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that eternal life in heaven is promised

to all who believe in him. Take the child, Jesus, with us each day by faith, trusting that in him alone is there love, and hope, and forgiveness, and that peace that passes all understanding.

The children were all set to put on the Christmas play. Mom and Dad were seated on the couch, with the rest of the living room as the stage. Little Stephen was dressed in his father's bathrobe carrying a mop handle, pretending to be Joseph.

His elder sister, Sarah, had a sheet draped over her head and was playing the part of Mary, while his younger sister, Anna, had a pillowcase over her arms pretending to be an angel.

In the center of the living room was a doll cradle and lying in the cradle, draped in a towel, was their cat, Muffin. As the play began, Stephen came in and knelt down by the cradle, and Sarah stood behind him. "I'm Joseph and this is Mary, and this is the manger with the baby Jesus," Stephen told his parents.

Anna entered moving her arms going up and down like an angel with wings. However, the motion of her arms startled Muffin, the cat, and she jumped out from underneath the towel, jumped out of the cradle, and ran to hide under a chair.

As she did this the children got all excited. They didn't want their play to be ruined. So all three of them ran after Muffin hollering, "Jesus, get back in the manger! Jesus, get back in the manger where you belong!"

On this day, my dear friends, the message of the angel to each of us is to take the child. Don't leave him back in the manger. Don't simply take him or our relationship for granted. May we rather take Jesus with us by faith.

And may each one of us know that he has promised to be there for us, and to love us, each day. Talk with him. Rely on him. Worship him. And love him with our whole heart. Take the child with you, and your New Year will surely be blessed!