

“New Year Predictions”

Matthew 2:13-23

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I could not have done it a year ago, and I doubt that anyone could. Who could have predicted what 2001 would be like? Who could have foretold the Attack upon America resulting in the loss of more than three thousand lives? Who would have believed that we would be at war before the end of the summer? Who could have envisioned that a president that lost the popular vote would win the hearts, confidence and respect of ninety percent of the electorate in less than one year? Who could have told us twelve months ago that Georgia, Georgia Tech and Florida would have new football coaches? What a memorable year it was. George Will referred to it as a “benchmark year.” I agree. We’ll be talking and writing about 2001 for a long time.

The page on the calendar has turned to 2002, though. It is time to quit reminiscing and look ahead. I wonder what this year will bring us? What will we be talking about a year from now? I don’t know and based upon the events of the past twelve months, I hesitate to speculate. However, there are some things I know and want to share them with you.

I know that 2002, like the previous year, will contain some surprises. For sure, the bulk of the year will be comprised of the routine and normal, but not all of it. The unexpected will arise. It is not a matter of if but when. I don’t know when it will occur, but sometime this year news will come that will send you down a road you have never traveled.

This was true for Mary and Joseph. After the Wise Men visited Jesus and brought him gifts, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, *“Get up, 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”* Matthew 2:13.

What a shock this must have been to Mary and Joseph. It was the last thing they wanted to hear and no doubt the last thing they thought they would hear. Can you imagine how it turned their lives upside down and interfered with their plans? Emotionally, they were already traveling down an unfamiliar road and now they were doing so geographically. To say their lives were filled with surprises would be an understatement.

We shall also face surprises in 2002. Like any year, 2002 will be a combination of the normal and abnormal, expected and unexpected, joys and sorrows and problems and tragedies. I can assure you, though, that news will come that will send you down a road you have never traveled.

These surprises will demand a lot from us. The challenge that confronted Mary and Joseph demanded a lot from them. It required wisdom, patience, courage, stamina, discipline, sacrifices, creativity, determination and trust. They could not have successfully met this challenge without an abundance of these traits and neither can we overcome our challenges without them, too.

So, where do you find these traits? Where can you go to obtain them? Where did Mary and Joseph go? I believe they went to the Lord.

A reading of the Christmas story reveals that Mary and Joseph were chosen by God to be Jesus' guardians because of their relationship with Him. It is evident that both of them were holy people who had a close relationship with God. They loved God and trusted Him. They were dedicated servants who were committed to doing His will. As a result, they received from God what they needed to overcome the challenges they faced.

Our faith needs to be as strong as Mary and Joseph's. In order to face the surprises and challenges that will inevitably come our way in 2002, we need to have a close relationship with God. If we do, when we begin traveling down an unfamiliar road, we'll not walk alone.

The song by Rodgers and Hammerstein, "**You'll Never Walk Alone**" certainly communicates this truth. Listen to its message.

When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark.

At the end of the storm is a golden sky and the sweet silver song of a lark.

Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown.

Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone. You'll never walk alone!

On this first Sunday of the New Year, I challenge and encourage you to strengthen your relationship with the Lord. You are going to need Him especially when news comes that will send you down a road you have never traveled.

Last week, I received an email from Fran Paist. Fran is a member of Smoke Rise whose life was filled with surprises in 2001. In her email she wrote, "When I think back to this time last year, I am amazed to realize that I was already afflicted with breast cancer and yet would not know it for another seven months. While this is a frightening thought, it pales in comparison to the realization that God has been so close to me in all of this. I firmly believe that I am solidly in His great grasp and that things have happened in my life for a reason. Through this ordeal, I have learned much and been so blessed that words simply cannot fill the spaces on the paper."

I hope you are "solidly in His great grasp," too, so that when news comes that will take you down an unfamiliar road, you will not walk alone.