

Dear Lillian Methodist Church family,

Matthew chapter 2 reveals marvelous evidence of God's providence. Jesus has been born in Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph. Scripture infers that Joseph kept his family in Bethlehem for up to two years after Jesus' birth. After this, the now famous "wise men" visited Jesus, bearing gifts. Shortly thereafter, Joseph took his young family to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod.

Scripture implies that after King Herod's death, Joseph had every intention of returning to Bethlehem and raising Jesus there. However, the land of Judea, which contains Bethlehem, was now ruled by King Herod's tyrannical son, Archelaus. After being warned in a dream, Joseph instead relocated back to Nazareth, where he and Mary previously lived. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus would now fulfill "what was spoken by the prophets, that He would be called a Nazarene." (Matt 2:23)

Why was Joseph so determined to leave Nazareth and raise Jesus near Bethlehem? It was likely because Nazareth had a bad reputation and its inhabitants were looked down upon by other Jews. Even Jesus' own disciples said so. (John 1:46) No doubt Joseph wanted to spare Jesus that embarrassment.

So why did God's providence force Joseph back to Nazareth? Looking carefully at what Matthew said, we observe that he doesn't quote a specific prophet. Rather, it is the consensus of several prophecies that Jesus would be treated with contempt by the Jews, just as Nazarenes were treated with contempt.

Psalms 22 (a prophetic Psalm) and Isaiah 53 both tell of a Messiah who would be despised, scorned and mocked, just like anyone from Nazareth. As an adult, Jesus would be despised, scorned and mocked, because the Jewish people rejected Him as their Messiah. Jesus the Messiah would be treated just like Jesus the Nazarene. In doing so, the prophecy was fulfilled.

Jesus said ".....everything written about Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and *the Psalms* must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44) This Christmas, focus not only on His miraculous birth, allowing God to become a man, but also how the providence of God intervened into history, ensuring that the smallest to the greatest details of prophecy were fulfilled.

Have a merry Christmas!

See y'all Sunday,  
Perry Cunningham  
Lay Leader