

Christmas 1 12/29/19
Matthew 2:13-23 A

“OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

Hark! The herald angels sing! Glory to the newborn King! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. The virgin bears a son who is Christ the Lord. God took on flesh to dwell among us. Joy to the world! The Lord has come!

But even in our celebration of Christmas, we are jarred back to the realization that there is little rest for those marked by the sign of the cross. “Out of Egypt I called My Son,” the Lord spoke through the Prophet. This morning, we want to look at why the newborn King had to flee to Egypt and why God called Him out of Egypt.

It all begins with Jacob. This is what we have been studying in our Sunday morning Bible class. Jacob fathered many sons. Finally, the wife he truly loved more than the others, Rachel, bears him a son, Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, and he didn’t do much to hide his favoritism. So, when Joseph was about 17, his brothers, in envy and hatred, plotted to kill him. But instead, they sold him into slavery in Egypt and, of course, lie to their father that his most favored son is dead. In Egypt, Joseph was bought by an officer of Pharaoh’s guard. He found favor in his master’s eyes and prospered, until the master’s wife told lies about him and he ended up in prison. Even there, God looked out for him and he soon found himself interpreting Pharaoh’s dream and in charge of all the food in Egypt. His brothers made their way to Egypt for food and, eventually, Joseph revealed himself to them, and his father learned he is still alive. After their father’s death, his brothers feared that now he will take revenge on them, but Joseph marvelously confessed his faith in the ways and will of God, “You

meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive (Ge 50).”

So, it was that the children of Jacob settled in Egypt and God saved and prospered them. That is, until the time a new king arose of Egypt and did not know Joseph. So, he enslaved God’s children and embittered their lives. God heard the groaning of his children. He sent Moses to deliver them from 400 years of bondage. After 9 plagues, the angel of death passed through the land and Egypt, the land of life, became the land of death. So, God delivered His children through the Red Seas waters to freedom; to the land flowing with milk and honey.

Imagine what it must have been like, to believe your favorite son had been killed and was dead all those many years. And, there Jacob was in the land of Canaan, in the midst of a famine. No food, surrounded by enemies on every side. Where should they go?

Egypt, a foreign land, a land of pagans and strangers to the Lord God. Jacob, you must remember, did not know that his son, Joseph, was not only alive, but that he was 2nd in charge of all Egypt. Joseph was really their protector, and he was the one that God would use to keep his father Jacob and all of his brothers’ safe.

Thousands of years later, another son of Jacob would go down to Egypt, but this son of Israel was not fleeing hunger; he is fleeing the wrath and hatred of an earthly king. In our Gospel reading, Herod is intent on killing Jesus because he perceived Him to be a threat to his kingdom and power. Since Herod did not know which young boy might be his potential rival, His hatred for Jesus ran so deep that he ordered every male child under two years old in Bethlehem be murdered

“An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him (v. 13).’ So, using the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh the wise men had given, the holy family was able to escape the death of a mad monarch.

So Jesus fled to Egypt, just like his father Jacob had done so many years before. The holy family’s flight to Egypt gives us a small glimpse into Jesus’ life on this earth and, already, we see that His life is not to be an easy one. “He came to His own,” John writes, “and his own people did not receive Him (Jn 1).” Born in a stable, no place to lay His head, this little one will do battle for your soul His entire life. But the battle He fights will not be fought with swords and guns and weapons. No, His weapons are poverty and weakness. He will die, but on the cross.

So what does this mean for you, Dear Child of God? The holy family’s flight to Egypt with the infant Jesus teaches us how to understand our lives on this side of heaven, lives that can be filled with suffering and adversity, worries and fears, doubts.

It’s hard to imagine that kind of hatred for the Prince of Peace, isn’t it? This is the part of the Christmas story that most people simply ignore, to try to pretend that it cannot be real.

Yet, Jesus is hated and rejected. And your life is a reflection of our Savior’s. When you look at His life, that is your life in Him. Just as He was not received by his own, we can expect no less. We will be loved by God, but just as Joseph was treated with envy and hatred, we will be met with the same at the hands of the world. At times, evil hands and hearts will lash out to harm and mistreat us, embittering our lives, stealing and vandalizing our property, defaming and ruining our reputations with their wagging tongues,

even harming us with violence against our bodies and lives. But in it all, we remember the words of Joseph, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive (Ge 50).” It was true of Joseph, and it is true of us.

And, we remember those Israelites enslaved in the land of death, Egypt. Here, on this side of heaven, we are enslaved to death and the grave and we cannot free ourselves. We are strangers here, in this land of death. God sent us a Deliverer, His only-begotten Son, whose birth we celebrate. We are marked by the blood of the Lamb – for our Deliverer is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – and death passes over us. Our Deliverer has burst the bonds of the grave and opened heaven to us. God delivers us through the waters of our baptism, that we may pass from the land of death to the promised land.

And, as we journey through the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death to the promised land of heaven, there will be days of trials and hardships. But look at Jacob. His Joseph protected him. Look at this babe fleeing in the arms of His mother. God used his Joseph to protect the holy family from vile Herod. Jesus is our Joseph. He will protect you. He will come to you in your doubt and weakness to wrap His arms of love around you and strengthen your feeble knees. He will provide all that you need for your body and life. And, He rescue you from every evil attack and bring you safely to His heavenly kingdom.

By virtue of your Baptism into Christ, you are always one with your Savior. His own life is wrapped up in yours. When you hurt and suffer, Christ hurts and suffers with you. And when He finishes His great journey to the cross and the empty tomb, your pilgrimage is complete.

That is the gift that He brings to you this Christmastide that goes beyond all understanding. He gives you the gift of peace, peace that He is in charge. Peace that He has suffered all things for you. And peace that will bring you eternal life.