

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Sunday after Christmas, December 29, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 99, 79, 294, 86, 98:5.

Lessons: Psalm 2, Hebrews 1:1 – 2:1, Matthew 1:18 – 2:12.

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:13-23.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What if God's plan of salvation had been interrupted and ended by the knife of an assassin? What if an evil king had murdered the baby born of Mary? Then we would have no hope of anything better than this world of sin, wickedness and corruption. Then we would have nothing better than what we can see and get in this world. But we know that God is all powerful and what he plans he can accomplish. God followed through on his plans of saving all mankind, despite the most wicked plans of humans. Let's talk today about

**THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT**

- 1. This was commanded by God.**
- 2. This was a necessary part of God's plan of salvation.**
- 3. This was another example of faith in following God's Word.**

An angel of the Lord spoke several times to Joseph, the man married to Jesus' mother, the man many supposed was the father of Jesus. In our Gospel lesson you heard how an angel appeared to him after Mary was *"found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 1:18) Then, *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him."* (Matthew 1:24)

Then Saint Matthew tells us of the birth of Jesus, and the history of the time the wise men, the Magi, came, worshipped Jesus and gave him *"gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."* (Matthew 2:11)

Bethlehem was about a two-hour walking journey from Jerusalem. It is easy to assume that the Magi could have gone there promptly after they had spoken to Herod. But we read *"After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was."* (Matthew 2:9)

It is also possible that they left Bethlehem that very same night that they worshipped Jesus and gave him gifts. There is no evidence that they spent any length of time in Bethlehem.

Then comes our sermon text and again, *"an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream."* We read that the angel then 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."*

We know from what happened that this was really an angel of the Lord that appeared to Joseph, and this is the way God spoke to him. The question might occur to us whether or not God would speak to us through an angel in a dream. But we have the assurance that God uses other means to speak to us. We believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. That is how God speaks to us today, through the Bible.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrew Christians tells us, also through verbal inspiration, that *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."* (Hebrews 1:1-3) That is the same Son whose birthday we are still celebrating. That is the same Son of whom John speaks *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

***He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.***” (John 1:1-4)

God speaks to us through his word, from Genesis to Revelation, although in the Bible he spoke a number of times through angels and other times in dreams. Joseph in our text is another example of God speaking to man through an angel. But God speaks to us through his written Word, the Bible.

The message of the angel is short and to the point: ***"Get up," he said, "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."***

Joseph was faced with another test of faith. Just as he had been led by God to believe the angel before Jesus was born and to take Mary as his wife when he had every human reason to divorce her quietly, so here we have another example of faith. He did what God tells him and he does it by faith.

In the Bible we have many examples of faith. God often tells someone to do something, something which may seem very strange, or even difficult or seemingly impossible to do. Humans are always reluctant to do what God says, yes, even us, unless we can see some benefit for us in doing that. But Jesus himself tells us in Luke 18:27 ***"What is impossible with men is possible with God."***

But God's blessings follow his commands. Curses follow us when we don't do what God tells us. We need only look to the first humans, Adam and Eve to see how curses – all the curses of sin and the need for a Savior – followed them when they didn't believe God's warning about obeying him. Those curses are still ours today, all the curses of sin. But we can find abundant examples of God's blessings, such as God telling Abraham to go far away to a land he promised him, and God telling Abraham to go and sacrifice his son Isaac. In many situations like these, what appeared to be impossible, or a bad choice for humans, turned out to be the perfect choice because God directed it.

Joseph had faith, and believed and obeyed God. There was to be no delay. Joseph was to ***"get up"***. That obviously didn't mean to 'wait a few days', or even 'wait until morning'. The verb translated as ***"escape"*** means to run away, to flee, to escape. There is a real urgency with this word. Do it now, the angel said!

In this example of an angel of God speaking to one who believes in him, the destination is also identified: Egypt. Joseph may not know it at the time, but they are also to stay there until an angel speaks to him again. The reason for fleeing to Egypt is even given: ***"Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."*** Anyone who knew terrible king Herod would know this was a serious threat. Herod, the one called "the great", was known to even murder his relatives. The secular historian Josephus even writes that wicked king Herod was afraid no one would weep for his death. So he ordered three thousand leaders in Israel to be put to death when he died so that people would weep at the time of his death!

God's Word says of Joseph: ***"So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod."*** Joseph and Mary and the Christ Child departed before morning. So in the morning, the Magi and Joseph's little family were simply gone. No one in Bethlehem could tell where they were or where they went, because no one knew.

After all the trouble and suffering the Israelites had endured in Egypt before the exodus led them to the promised land in Canaan, it might seem like a strange place for Joseph and Mary to go with the Christ Child. But it was not so strange after all. First of all, it was God's direct command. And we also need to realize that Egypt had been a traditional place of refuge. Abraham had gone to Egypt during a time of famine. Jacob and his family of 70 souls took refuge in Egypt for the same reason. And they became a mighty nation there. They remained in Egypt until God let them out under Moses some 430 years later. Evil king Jeroboam fled to Egypt when Solomon tried to kill him. In the days of Jeremiah, a man named Uriah who prophesied in the name of the Lord also fled to Egypt. Even at the time of Mary and Joseph, there were many Jews in Egypt, so Mary and Joseph could probably feel quite at home and secure there, and especially so because God himself had told them to escape there.

But even more important than any examples of Jews fleeing to Egypt was the fact that an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to go to Egypt.

We can also assume that they probably used the costly gifts from the Magi to finance their journey and their stay in Egypt. The wise men from the east had presented them with precious gifts of gold, and incense,

and myrrh. Surely the gold would have come in handy as they fled to Egypt. Whether or not they actually had a donkey, as artists often suggest, we don't really know. But one thing is certain. The Lord provided for them.

Furthermore, Matthew informs us that the flight to Egypt and the return to the land of Israel, when Herod was dead fulfilled a prophecy of Hosea: ***"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."*** (Hosea 11:1)

God brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, and their exodus foreshadowed the calling of God's Son from Egypt. Matthew quotes Hosea: ***"And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"*** Hosea was not merely recording some event in Israel's history: he was also foretelling an event in the life of God's Son, the Messiah. Jesus was not in bondage to anyone: to sin, to the devil, to death. Yet his birth, entire life and carefully foretold death were all necessary to free mankind from bondage.

Although we are not going to concentrate today on the murder of all baby boys in Bethlehem two years old and under, let's hear Matthew tell about that slaughter of the infants:

***"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'"*** We don't know how many baby boys were murdered. But the death of any child is sad, especially so for the mother and father, or at least, we would think it should be sad. However, millions have, in ignorance of God's will, in selfishness, and in outright defiance of God, for countless reasons murdered unborn children. Herod's despicable act is repeated frequently in our nation. Although there is always an outcry over the murder of children in our nation, not many people are stirred up in the same way to cry out over the murder of unborn children through intentional abortions.

Rachel weeping for her children represented all the Jewish mothers who wept over Israel's tragedy in the days of Jeremiah. She also typifies the grieving mothers at Bethlehem, as God's Word points out here.

Finally, Jesus and his family return home – to the land of Israel. ***"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.' So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"***

Again, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. But because Herod's cruel son Archelaus was ruling in Judea, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph settled in Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph had been living before the birth of Jesus.

This flight into Egypt is another example of the blessings that come from following God. Things may look really bleak on earth, but when we follow our Savior in faith, we will be blessed ultimately with eternal life, and often with earthly blessings before we get to heaven.

This seemingly insignificant hurried trip to Egypt of two people with a young child was an essential step in your salvation. If Jesus' life had been cut short, you would have no hope of anything better than this life on earth. If Herod had been allowed to murder him, God's plan of salvation for you would have ended. But your gracious God, the one who speaks to you in the Bible, found it necessary for your savior and Mary and Joseph to flee for their lives, even in the middle of the night so that you may have the hope of eternal life. For this we can be eternally thankful. Amen.