

## Week of December 13, 2020

### Matthew 2:13-23

<sup>13</sup> When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord 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 will soon search for the child in order to kill him."<sup>14</sup> Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. <sup>15</sup> He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

<sup>16</sup> When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. <sup>17</sup> This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

<sup>18</sup> A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and much grieving. Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were no more.

<sup>19</sup> After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. <sup>20</sup> "Get up," the angel said, "and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead."<sup>21</sup> Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

---

### Christmas Vacation

When I was young, Christmas always involved travel. We'd pack up on Christmas Eve and take off to my grandparents' house in Valdosta, GA. On the trip we'd sing Christmas songs and do activity books my mom bought to keep us entertained on the 3.5 hour drive that felt like it took eons. When we arrived at Grampa and Grammy's my brother and I would be given snacks - a plate full of olives, pickles, and cheese that we absolutely adored and came to associate with Christmas itself. Then my mom would give us money and Grampa would take us to K-Mart to buy her Christmas present. When we got back from shopping, I hung out on the couch with Grammy watching TV while my brother sat at Grampa's desk doing a puzzle. When we woke up the next morning, the living room was a sea of presents under their little potted Norfolk Pine that had been decorated with red ornaments. On that day, above all others, I felt like the most special person in the world - a day where our poverty meant nothing and we celebrated like other kids our age. The travel stopped when my Grampa died and Christmas never quite felt the same after that. I'm back to travelling for Christmas as an adult, but now to see Liz's family. It's always a hectic trip, but one I look forward to each year because there are so many new traditions I've been invited to take part in that I love. They're traditions I hope Walt will learn to love, too, even as we make our own family traditions around the holiday. Many families have traditions that involve travel around Christmas, and it's not a new thing - even Jesus' family had them.

Matthew's tale of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt because of Herod's murderous plot is similar to the story in Exodus of Pharaoh issuing a decree that all Hebrew boys were to be killed. In the Exodus story, Moses was born and was able to survive due to the quick thinking of his sister, who convinced Pharaoh's daughter to raise the child as her own and to hire their mother as a nurse. This connection is more than a neat coincidence - it helped Matthew's audience, who were ethnically and religiously Jewish, to connect Jesus to Moses.

I imagine their trip to Egypt from Bethlehem was fraught. While we have to put up with heavy traffic and annoyed children tired of sitting in the car for too long, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had more serious concerns. They got their warning in the middle of the night, and I can't imagine Joseph waited very long before he got everyone up and out the door, grabbing whatever they

could get their hands on before fleeing for their lives. They may not have had time to get many supplies, and it's desert between Bethlehem and population centers in Egypt, so there wouldn't have been many places to stop along the way. And it was an incredibly long trip - Google says Bethlehem to Cairo (probably not where they went, but we don't know where they went!) is about 260 miles as the crow flies, and likely much longer when travel paths were followed. While they might have had a donkey, it wouldn't have made the trip that much easier. And all with a newborn! It's unfathomable that they made this trip and survived. Their travel is often forgotten in the larger Christmas narrative, but it's worth remembering.

Travel may or may not be part of your plans this year, but it'll return. And when it does, we can remember that Christ, too, took a Christmas trip. His kind of travel was a whole lot different than ours, rather than a trip for fun and family, his trip ensured he'd be able to walk among us, teach us, and die for us. It's a memory we should hold onto, thankful for the gift of refuge in a foreign land. May we remember Jesus' need for safe harbor and find ways to welcome all those in need of a refuge from life's storms.

---

*Savior of the nations, you ran away from danger in order to walk among us. And when the time was right, you ran to danger so that we might walk with you. May we cherish the life you have given us by your dying and rising again, and hear your call to work for justice, ensuring no child would ever need to flee from evil again. Amen.*