

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday After Christmas, December 29, 2019**

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

Hymns: 86, 131:1-2, 99, 273, 79.

Lessons: Psalm 2, Hebrews 1:1 – 2:3, Matthew 1:18 - 2:12.

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 God followed through on his plan, despite the most wicked plans of humans. Let's talk today about

### THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

- 1. This necessary part of God's plan of salvation was commanded by God.**
- 2. This was a test of Joseph's faith – twice!**

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.”*** Then, ***“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”***

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.”***

Bethlehem would have been about a two-hour walk from Jerusalem. It is easy to assume that the Magi could have arrived there on the same day they had spoken to Herod. It is also possible that they left Bethlehem that very same night. 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, and God speaks to us today through his written Word, 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 NIV) 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 NIV)

God speaks to us through his word, from Genesis to Revelation, although in the Bible he sometimes spoke through angels in dreams. Joseph in our text is another example of that.

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 – 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 to do. Humans are always reluctant to do what God says, yes, even you and I, unless we can see some benefit for us in doing that. 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 commands to obey 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 to a land he promised him, and God telling Abraham to go and sacrifice his son Isaac. These things in Abraham's life turned out to lead to blessings for Abraham, and not only him, but for all mankind, including us today.

There was to be no delay. Joseph was to ***“get up”***. That obviously didn't mean to wait a few weeks, or even wait until morning. Joseph had faith, and believed and obeyed God. The word translated as ***“escape”*** means to run away, to flee. 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 mentioned: Egypt. They are also to stay there until an angel speaks to him again. The reason 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. But this message was from God. Herod, the one called “the great” was known to even murder his relatives. Listen to this example of his wickedness: The secular historian Josephus 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 ***“So [Joseph] 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, Joseph's little family was 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, 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 led them out under Moses some 400 years later. 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.

But even more important than these examples of Jews fleeing to Egypt was the fact that an angel of the Lord spoke directly 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 lived in Egypt for a time.

The Lord provided for them.

In addition, 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 NIV) God brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, and their exodus foreshadowed the calling of God's Son from Egypt. Matthew even 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 was necessary to free mankind from bondage of sin, of the devil, and of death.

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 again 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 even one child is heart-rending and sad, especially so for the mother and father, or at least, we would think it should be sad. However, millions have, in selfishness, in ignorance, or for countless other reasons, murdered unborn children. Herod's despicable act of murder is repeated frequently in our nation. Abortion is available in all our states almost “on demand”. But in our nation we have the opportunity to work at changing laws which permit such abortion. Thanks be to God that abortion is not demanded by the government, as it had been in China! The only reason China has loosened its commands to kill unborn children is that it has realized it is not beneficial to its country. As Christians we want to do all that we can to follow God's Will, and we still have a voice in electing who represents us in our government.

Rachel, who was buried in Bethlehem, 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 at this time, as God's Word points out here.

Jesus and his family eventually 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 even in our lives, but when we follow our Savior in faith, we will be blessed ultimately with eternal life.

This seemingly insignificant hurried trip to Egypt 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 Jesus, God's plan of salvation for you would have ended. Jesus was eventually killed, executed, murdered, for your salvation. But this happened when God determined it should happen, not when evil king Herod wanted to do it. 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.