

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Second Sunday After Christmas – January 2, 2022
Matthew 2:13-23 – Out of Egypt I Called My Son
By Vicar Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Christ our newborn king! Amen. Hear again from the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday after Christmas, from Matthew chapter 2, **“When the wise men had departed, behold, 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.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”** This is our text.

“Out of Egypt I called my son.” That’s a quote from Hosea 11:1. In that verse, God is recounting his faithfulness and love toward Israel, despite Israel’s backsliding and unfaithfulness. Hosea wrote, **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.”**¹ On the surface, this verse doesn’t have much to do with Christmas. Frankly, in the story of the flight into Egypt it seems like Matthew has ripped Hosea 11:1 out of context. Hosea was talking about the whole nation of Israel when he mentioned God’s son. He was talking about Israel’s unfaithfulness, not the righteous and faithful Son of God. Yet Matthew reapplies Hosea’s words to a single person, to Jesus fleeing with his parents down to Egypt and returning to Nazareth.

But Matthew is doing no injustice to Hosea’s prophetic word. His point in saying that Jesus is God’s son called out of Egypt is that Jesus is Israel embodied in one man, Israel rolled into one. Jesus is the faithful Son that Israel should have been. Since the ancient nation of Israel did not walk before God in holiness and righteousness, Jesus is born to do it again, and do it right. So just as ancient Israel went down into Egypt, Jesus is retracing their steps. And just as God called Israel out of Egypt and delivered them from Pharaoh by a strong hand and a mighty arm, God calls his infant Son out of Egypt and delivers him from Herod. The point is that Jesus fulfills Israel’s calling in every detail, so that he can go to the cross to redeem Israel, so that he can restore God’s people and establish a new Israel, the church, so that we might be called sons of God.

This explains the Old Testament selection for today from Genesis 46. Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, became the father of the twelve tribes. As the ancestor of God’s people, Israel embodied God’s people, just as Jesus is Israel rolled into one. But in Genesis 46, Israel is anxious about whether he should go down to Egypt to see his long-lost son Joseph. Should he leave Canaan, the land God promised to him and to Abraham and Isaac? Will God be with him in a land he has not promised? Israel knew what would likely happen in Egypt, because God had told his grandfather Abraham, **“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.”**² So Israel prayed and offered sacrifices, and God answered in a vision, to reassure him, **“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”**³ By this God showed that everything that would happen in Egypt – Israel enslaved, then delivered through Moses – all was according to God’s plan of salvation. And now at Christmas we see the climax of that plan. The new Moses, the new Israel rolled into one, Jesus is born to lead his people out of this evil world by a new Exodus, to a new Promised Land, to heaven.

But although God’s glorious plan of salvation is playing out, today a horrible tragedy mars our rejoicing at the birth of the Son of God. Instead of glory, there is agony. God’s littlest sons of Israel, the baby boys of Bethlehem are slaughtered by a false king, by envious Herod. Instead of rejoicing, a voice is heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children. Immanuel, the true king, is here! God is finally with us! Yet the result is not peace, but a sword. Innocent babies slain as martyrs on Christ’s behalf.

Why did Christ allow their murder? These children were his same age, killed on his account. Why did he

¹ Hosea 11:1-2

² Genesis 15:13-14

³ Genesis 46:3-4

let them die for his sake? They were his fellow sons of Israel, adopted through circumcision to become sons of God. Jesus came to be their king, why did he abandon his little soldiers of the cross?

Although God permits evil, although he foreknows all evil that will happen, we must not blame God for any evil. God is not the cause of evil. The blame for the death of the Holy Innocents goes entirely to the devil, the world, and Herod's sinful human nature. It was Herod, not Christ, who killed the children. Through Herod, Satan was trying to stop God's plan of salvation. The true light came into the world, but the world hated him, and on his account his children always suffer persecution.

God permits evil, he permits unjust suffering, because through it he provides escape from sin. God's ultimate purpose in the unjust death of the Holy Innocents was the salvation of the world. He preserved Jesus' life to bring him to the cross. At the proper time our Lord suffered unjustly on behalf of the Holy Innocents, on behalf of all Israel, on our behalf. Christ fled from Herod as a baby so that, in time, he might defeat Satan for us. Even the ancient prophets knew that Christ could not be killed while still a nursing infant. Moses wrote in the commandments, **"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."**⁴ A strange statement. By this statement Moses foreshadowed that Christ would be the true Lamb of God: a lamb appointed to die at maturity like a sacrificial goat, not boiled prematurely in his mother's milk. As a grown man the Son of God would not flee the death he escaped as an infant, he would go willingly to the cross to redeem Israel.

And so Christ did not neglect his little soldiers. He did not abandon them, but he redeemed them and promoted them to victory in heaven. As adopted sons of God – by faith in Jesus the firstborn Son – they were guaranteed the inheritance promised to Abraham. So Jesus defeated their enemy for them. He gave them the crown of life, victory without struggle, without enduring the trials of life in this world. And this is how we should think of all little ones who die in faith. Infants and the stillborn and aborted – children who their parents prayed for and who heard God's word even in the womb – these are Christ's soldiers sent on ahead to heaven. For God claims them as his own sons, he gives them implicit faith and simple trust in Jesus, and through Jesus he makes them heirs of eternal life.

When God became a baby, he showed that he loves the little children, he loves those of simple faith. Yet in America today, a voice is not heard in Ramah. Rachel is not weeping for her children, because she has the right to kill her own children and shed no tears at all. The doctrine that a woman has the right to do what she chooses with the fruit of her womb is a direct attack on Christ. Jesus is for life. Herod is for death. Jesus became a baby. Herod murdered babies. Pray that our evil laws be overturned, that our nation no longer join with Herod against Jesus.

"Out of Egypt I called my son." Jesus is truly God's Son, he is the true Israel embodied in one man. And he unites all Israel in his body, the church. Through baptism you are called sons of God. And because you are clothed in Christ's righteousness, God sees you as his holy innocents, his beloved children. First John 3, **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."**⁵ Jesus has called you out of Egypt, out of slavery to sin. He has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.⁶ So in this new year, live as sons of the light, live in Christ, live as the new Israel in the faith of Abraham. And since in his great love God has called you his sons, do not fall into backsliding like unfaithful Israel.

Yes, you are the new Israel, you have the promises of Abraham. Our gospel text today illustrates that truth. It shows that Jesus is the light of all the Gentiles, he offers salvation to the whole world. For in the magi from the east, Babylon came to see the Christ child. And then Christ brought the light of salvation to the Gentiles of Egypt. Babylon and Egypt. These Gentile nations foreshadow the last chapter of Matthew, when Jesus sent his apostles into all the nations to baptize, teach, and preach. For the Christ child was born to die, not only for the Jews, but for the world, for all of us Gentiles, to gather us in the new Israel, the church.

But as the new Israel, as you live as sons of God, do not be surprised that the world which hated Christ hates you also. So Peter exhorts us in our epistle text, **"Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."**⁷

When we suffer as Christians, when we are despised for confessing God's word against the evil and perversion of our society, against all forms of murder and abortion, we partake in Christ's suffering. For from the

⁴ Exodus 23:19

⁵ 1 John 3:1

⁶ 1 Peter 2:9

⁷ 1 Peter 4:12-13

moment of his birth, Jesus suffered shame. He was not born in a king's palace but in a stable. He was forced to flee for his life. He grieved the death of innocent babies who died in Bethlehem on his account. And he suffered humiliating death for us on the cross. So we, taking up our crosses to follow him, rejoice that God counts us worthy to suffer for his name. And he has promised, **“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**⁸ Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

⁸ Matthew 5:11-12