

**First Sunday after Christmas – December 29, 2019**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Matthew 2:13-23 (EHV)**

**After the Wise Men were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream. He said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, because Herod will search for the child in order to kill him.” 14) Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt. 15) He stayed there until the death of Herod. This happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” 16) When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Wise Men, he was furious. He issued orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under. This was in keeping with the exact time he had learned from the Wise Men. 17) Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18) A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and she refused to be comforted, because they are no more. 19) After Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. The angel said, 20) “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” 21) Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22) But when he heard that Archelaus, Herod’s son, had succeeded his father as ruler in Judea, he was afraid to go there. Since he had been warned in a dream, he went to the region of Galilee. 23) When he arrived there, he settled in a city called Nazareth. So what was spoken through the prophets was fulfilled: “He will be called a Nazarene.”**

Friends in Christ:

Even though it’s Christmas time – the “bad news” doesn’t take a break. In recent days, sadly, the news reports have included accounts of fatal auto and plane accidents. People still got sick – some even had to be hospitalized. Funerals for loved ones were held. Situations like that are hard to deal with at any time of the year but they seem especially hard to accept at this time of year. It seems to us that Christmas with its joy and gladness and death with its heartbreak and sorrow just don’t really belong together.

Even if our lives haven’t been touched by tragedy and grief can’t help but feeling a little bit let down as we look ahead to going back to our routines of school and work and coping with all the concerns and uncertainties of our normal routines. A few weeks of glad anticipation for the children, a few hours or days of happy celebration, and then all too quickly things get back to normal. Everything seems the same as it had been before the holiday break.

It is for a world like this

- A world full of problems and difficulties
- A world that knows no lasting happiness
- A world in which it seems to often be true that “After much laughter comes weeping.”
- A world in which we don’t have a clue what tomorrow will bring
- A world in which we can be sure of having to come face to face with sickness, death, and tragedies
- A world full of heartaches

It is for a world like this that Christmas and Christian faith are so important because they remind us:

**Theme:** You can face the days ahead with confidence.

- If we think that it is too bad that Christmas is so often touched by sorrow
- If we think that it is too bad that our life cannot always be as happy as it is at Christmastime
- If we think that it is too bad that after Christmas we must go back to a world where the lights are not always bright and the songs are not always merry
- Then we ought to remember what happened shortly after the very first Christmas.

Even that first Christmas – which heard the angel choirs sing of glad tidings of great joy – was followed by sorrow and pain. A week went by, and the little baby Jesus was circumcised. He shed the very first drops of his blood for us. A bit more time went by, and wise men came to offer their gifts of love to the Christ Child. But that happy occasion was followed by the sorrowful events in our text.

Our text tells how the King of kings had to flee to Egypt to escape from the hatred of a petty king who ruled over a territory which was even smaller than the state of Wisconsin. That was a bad world too – the world into which the Christ Child had come to live, a world which hated the Son of God, a world in which little babies had to hide or die because of a jealous, cruel and godless king.

As we go back to our everyday routines following Christmas we can find a great deal of comfort and encouragement for our own lives as the Holy Spirit guides us on our meditation of our Savior’s Flight into Egypt.

After the wise men had brought their gifts, the Lord sent his angel messenger to Joseph once again. The angel told Joseph that it was necessary for the safety and welfare of the baby Jesus that he and Mary and the baby should flee to the land of Egypt – the same land from which God so many years ago had rescued the children of Israel. It must have been a real test of Joseph’s faith to hear the angel say: **“Get up ... and flee ... Run for your lives!**

Joseph knew that Jesus was Immanuel – God with us. Before the child was born the angel told him that the child Mary would give birth to had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was with Mary in the stable when the shepherds came and told them about the message they had heard the angels proclaim in hills of Judea. “This is Christ the Lord,” the angel told them. Joseph was there in the temple when Simeon took the child into his arms and sang: Lord now you let your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the eyes of all people. And Joseph was there when the wise men came from the East to worship this child and present him with gifts of love and devotion.

And now God commanded him to get up and to flee in the middle of the night so that Herod won’t be able to kill this child – the Son of God. If you and I had been in Joseph’s place we might have figured that if Jesus was really God – the almighty eternal God who had come to live in this world, that there was no real reason to be afraid of what Herod might do. We might have felt that it was unworthy the Son of God to flee in weakness. But silent Joseph – a man of faith and action – didn’t argue. He did what he was told. He left for Egypt that very night.

Here we have a foreshadowing of what life would be like for the Christ Child in this world. He was persecuted, he suffered because he had come to bear our grief and carry our sorrows. He wasn’t even safe in the land and among the people he had honored by being born there.

But it wasn’t just the Christ Child who had to flee into Egypt. Mary and Joseph also had to flee simply because Jesus had come to live in their home! Wouldn’t you expect that if the Son of God lived in their home that things would go really well for them? Yet, after the birth of Jesus – they still had grief and trouble – some of it was a direct result of their relationship to this child. Still what a blessed privilege was theirs! Even though

we have celebrated our Savior's birth, even though we have found joy in that birth – we must still expect to experience sorrows and trials. The coming year will be like any other year in the past. There may be funerals in our congregation in the coming year. We will need to pray for the sick and the sorrowing. We will need to find ways to deal with all kinds of “bad news.” We will experience sorrow and cry our share of tears.

The little town of Bethlehem, where the angels spoke tidings of great joy – became a place of bitter tears. Even though the wise men did not return to king Herod to tell him where Jesus was – Herod still sent out his soldiers to kill the babes of Bethlehem in an effort to get rid of Jesus.

And so even when the glad tidings of our Savior's birth have gladdened our hearts; it is not a foregone conclusion that our joy will last forever in this lifetime. In fact those very same hearts in which Christ has made his manger bed will often be broken by sadness. There is no guarantee that this year will be pain and sorrow free for us.

Yet we can face the days which lie ahead with confidence because we know

- That in spite of all appearances, the Lord Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords
- That he is still supreme
- That he still rules the universe – even though he fled from King Herod

For this account of Jesus flight into Egypt which seems to speak of weakness and humility also shows us his divinity. Herod had soldiers whom he sent out to try to kill the Christ Child, but the Christ-child had servants more powerful than Herod's men. They protected him against the blood thirsty king Herod without shedding a drop of blood. Before Herod could make a move, one of the Lord's angels told the wise men not to return to Herod to tell him where the Christ Child was. The Christ child had angels to serve him – Herod only had men. Another angel told Joseph to take Jesus to Egypt. So Herod in spite of all his secret police and armed soldiers was helpless to accomplish what he desired.

We too can be sure that the Lord will send his angels to watch over us, for it is written: **Are not all angels ministering spirits sent out to serve for the benefit of those who are going to inherit salvation?** (Hebrews 1:14 EHV) Again it is written: **he will give a command to his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. 12) They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.** (Psalm 91:11-12 EHV)

The sons and daughters of world leaders have secret service men to watch and protect them wherever they go – you and I as children of God have legions of angels watching over us: **The Angel of the Lord camps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.** (Psalm 34:7 EHV)

Herod had not told the wise men the real reason why he wanted them to come back and tell him where Jesus was. He had lied to them – telling them that he wanted to worship him. But God knew what Herod was planning and so he stepped in to warn the wise men and to protect the Christ-child. Mary and Joseph had no way of knowing about the wicked plot of Herod. If it had not been for the message of the angel they would have stayed in Bethlehem. But God knew what was in the wind and he did what needed to be done.

Neither you nor I know what the devil and evil men throughout the world are planning, but God knows, and he knows what needs to be done to insure our safety. Already in the pages of the Old testament God had revealed his plan to rescue his Son from Egypt as our text reports: **This happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”** As we ponder the account of our Savior's flight to Egypt; we see that God's foreknowledge was a blessing to Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child. This foreknowledge provides us blessings and comfort too.

We have the assurance, given to us in the word of God that all the sorrow that came to the Christ Child – came because he had come to take away our sins. Even those sufferings that came to him in his infancy were sufferings which we deserved for our sins. And in the love that prompted him to do all this for us, we find our hope for this life and our comfort in its sorrows. As Jesus himself fled to a place of safety in Egypt – so we have a place of refuge in his great love for us. We may not always understand why things have to be the way they are, but we do know that he loves us with an everlasting love. Just as Jesus came back from Egypt to his native land, so he will bring us out of the “Egypt of this world” to our heavenly home. May God grant that to each of us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.