

“Rachel Weeping for Her Children”

Matthew 2:13-23

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Matthew 2:13-23

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, 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.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly 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 seeking the child’s life are dead.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

Prayer.

I thought today was a hymn sing,
A Christmas carol extravaganza,
Where we can release Advent’s pent up
joy
Hang on to Christmas one last time
And post-pone the un-decoration blues?
We come to worship
And what gets splashed in our face?
Homicide.

It is as if the Bible reflects life
As reported on CNN.

Indeed,
The wise men have barely made their
leave
Before Herod acts
With brutal violence.
One’s mind can’t help but think
The estranged daughter who killed her
family
In suburban Seattle, Christmas Eve night

or
Of Benazir Bhutto's outrageous
assassination
Just three days ago.
It is as if we were shorted some
Or most of the 12-Days of Christmas this
year.

Scripture does reflect life
For the realities of sin and death
Of faithfulness and forgiveness
Of love and eternal life
Are the same today
as they were in the time of Jesus.
Scripture is, however,
more than a reading of the Sunday paper.
Scripture reflects life
Imprinted with Divine intervention;
The give and take
The action and reaction
Of a creative
Benevolent
All loving God
Who seeks
To guide
A less-than perfect creation.

It is an act of mercy that God
Intervenes and saves the life
Of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.
It is a cowardly act of human greed
That Herod assassinates the innocents.
In this stark juxtaposition
Scripture unveils exactly why
The Prince of Peace was sent into the
world:
The only true power in this world
Comes from God above.
It can't be granted or won
By earthly ambition.
And the characteristics of God's power
Are mercy, love, forgiveness, and
salvation.

Mercy and love sent an angel in a dream
To the unknowing but receptive step-
father, Joseph.
Save yourself
And get thee to Egypt!

Interesting, isn't it?
Joseph in Egypt.
The last time a Joseph was in Egypt
(We recall from our Old Testament Torah)
Traacherous sibilings had sold him there.
Remember Joseph, son of Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob?
Pharaoh had taken him in
And he had risen in rank above all others.
His brothers return
Seeking food
For a famine had spread across the land.
Joseph had supplied their food,
Though they didn't recognize him.
When he reveals himself to his brothers,
He says "do not be distressed or angry
with yourselves ...
for God sent me before you to preserve
life."¹

Both Josephs,
Joseph the son of Jacob
And Joseph the step-father of Jesus
Place their life in the hands of God
Obeys God's command,
And is ushered into salvation's fold.
The inner strength, piety, and obedience
Of both Josephs are tested
And proved in adverse situation in life.
Indeed, salvation comes
To those who are faithful,
Who recognize the imprint of God
Acting in their midst,
And are willing to respond
To the divine initiative.

¹ Genesis 45:5c

God is patient
And willing to act over a period of
generations
To exert His will
To lead people towards His ways.
Matthew makes great effort to
demonstrate
The fact that God began
The coming of Christ
By using the prophet Hosea
Hundreds of years before Jesus
To prophesize: "Out of Egypt
I have called my son."²
God speaks through Jeremiah
Hundreds of years before Jesus
With these words:
"A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more."³
Finally, from the prophet Isaiah
God spoke
"He will be called a Nazorean"⁴
because he is a shoot
from the family of Jesse.

God is patient
And willing to work over many
generations.
In our small little worlds
And in our brief, relatively short life-
spans,
We often fail to see the revelation
Of God's greater plan.
We have nothing more than what Joseph
had:

² Hosea 11:1

³ Jeremiah 31:15

⁴ Isaiah 11:1

A receptive and faithful heart
Willing to work and act on God's behalf
For God's greater glory.
Whereas Joseph was given a dream
We've been given the Spirit's vision
With the gift of scriptures,
Today's Church
Together with its pastors, preachers, and
teachers.
We must trust that scripture
And the Spirit working through it
is sufficient.
We must trust the God that has given us
the scripture.
And we must trust that God has our best
interests
Protected in His heart.

Trust
And Obey.
The Word of the Lord.
Amen.