

Joseph Did You Know, Pt 2: Why your trip to Egypt was so important?

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at GCBC on December 29, 2013

Let's continue our worship in God's Word by turning to Matthew's gospel.

If you read the title of my message today, you may think it weird I am doing part 2 of a message I did a year ago, so let me explain. I know some maybe haven't been with us since last Christmas, so if this is an annual tradition for you to be with family over the holidays we're glad to have you here and I'm glad to look again at an often overlooked character in the Christmas story.

Last year I described how in some children's plays the cow has more lines than Joseph. At least the cattle are lowing, with Styrofoam horns and velvet ears, but Joseph in the Christmas pageant usually has nothing to do or say except to help the donkey and stand by the little girl with a pillow under her shirt playing pregnant Mary. Maybe Joseph shrugs to the in-keeper before leading Mary to the manger prop, but he's basically seen as a supporting actor until he gets the main actress Mary to center stage and then he fades into the background, apparently only being useful in his role as an usher.

But as I said then and I'll say again: Don't leave him in the manger shadows and don't have in your mind a guy who does nothing more than his ceramic statue who's off to the side of a Nativity set. He's not just a prop or a stand-in who's not really family. He's not like that guest that as you take family pictures, he isn't sure if he should be in them, but you don't want him to feel bad so you say, "no, you too, get in there." Joseph's not awkwardly standing around as a 3rd wheel, not sure that he really belongs. Joseph deserves his rightful place next to Christ in the Christmas scene. Not only as a husband to Mary, but in marriage, had Joseph become the legal father of her son Jesus.

Caesar Augustus, who issued the decree that drew this couple to Bethlehem, he had the same relationship to Julius Caesar Jesus had to Joseph. Augustus was not a biological son of Julius Caesar, but by the law he was a legal son and heir of the throne that had to be passed on through the father's lineage. Augustus couldn't be king if his legal adoptive father wasn't the kingly line.

Joseph of Nazareth was part of the Jewish kingly line of David, so his legal

adoption of Jesus by his marriage to Mary in their culture was important for the claims of Jesus to be king and legal heir to David's throne. Jesus was not biologically Joseph's child, He was the Son of God and a virgin-conceived physical son of Mary, but Joseph adopted Jesus by their laws in marriage which made him legal heir to the house and lineage of David (Matt 1, Lk 1).

If Joseph doesn't have a real relationship with Jesus as His father, there is no real claim Jesus can make to be Messiah, and we're all in real trouble. This is just as important as a virgin conception and virgin birth really happening. As Joseph really takes on his role, Jesus takes on His role as the real King.

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Mt 1:1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David ... [then v. 6 traces the kingly line of David all the way down to v. 16]

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah ["anointed one"/the Messianic King].

When Mary becomes pregnant before the wedding, v. 20 says of Joseph:

"But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife ... [the Lord reminds Joseph of his ancestry from David's lineage and explains to him this child will be the Messiah Isaiah promised]

24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. [Part of the law in taking a mother as a wife was taking on her children as an adoptive father, and it was also in their culture the father's role to name the child, as he does]

Joseph is pivotal and critical to this story, but he's often forgotten. And one of the details that's also often forgotten about Joseph that we didn't look at last year is what we see he did in the next chapter when the Magi left them. Matt. 2:13 says "Now when they had gone, behold, 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 going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He 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 CALLED MY SON." 16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi ...[look at v. 19:] But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

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Joseph did you know? When the angel told you to name Him as His father, His name would bring salvation to your other sons and daughters? Did you know when you fled to Egypt to keep Him safe from danger, The Lord who rescued Israel from Egypt you rescued from a manger?!

That's an amazing thought, that God took on the form of a helpless baby to rescue us, but first in His human weakness baby Jesus had to be rescued by Joseph! I want us to see 3 reasons why Joseph's trip to Egypt is important. In the Christmas story 3 reasons we can't forget Joseph's flight into Egypt:

1. It Reflects God toward His Children
2. It Contrasts the World's View of Children

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3. It Shows Us Man Can't Stop King Jesus and His Gospel for All

This has much to say about our world and how God deals with His children.

An article asks an interesting question on the 2nd half of this chapter: 'why has the modern Western reader of Matthew clung to the story of the Magi [in v. 1-12] but brushed aside the story of Egyptian exile [in v. 13-21]? Why is that portion of Matthew's narrative ignored? Is it less skillfully written? Does it lack dramatic impact? Is it an inferior product of Matthew's artistry? No, the fault it seems lies not with the one who fashioned the story but with the ones who now hear it, or ... refuse to hear it ...?

There have been times in the past when Christians focused on the holy family's sojourn in Egypt. It was a common theme in medieval art. It was the topic of endless tales shared in many early Christian communities. Why is it now a faded and ignored story [this time of year]? Our modern culture has celebrated Christmas with Luke's shepherds and angels, and we have brought Matthew's Magi into our pageants ... It seems that as long as we can associate baby Jesus with nice gifts offered by prestigious rulers, as long as we can picture him as heir to Davidic grandeur, as long as we can see him in the quietness of a ... scene surrounded by domesticated animals, then the child is no threat to our vision of the world.

But the remainder of Matthew's story will not let us escape so easily. We are forced to see in stark words and bloody actions that our Savior's birth was met with royal rejection, military executions, and ... exile. We are led to picture the holy family as refugees on the run. In an age where faith is equated with success and sorrow is deemed a mark of unbelief, in a time when Christian worship is presented almost entirely in the triumphal tones of happy celebration while the reality of suffering is brushed aside, in a culture that does everything it can to ignore, escape, deny, and cover up the ever-present reality of death, in the midst of all this, comes Matthew's simple story of a rejected baby facing execution ... let us come to recognize the sense of tragedy and grief that should be more of a reality for people who hold to the cross as their symbol of faith. Our Lord was born as a refugee, lived as a ridiculed Nazarene [v. 23, a persecuted people some said nothing 'good could come from'] ... our own stories will be truer to life and to the gospel if we understand that part of our calling is suffering and caring for the refugees, Nazarenes, and forsaken people of our own world.'

When you picture the Magi worshipping the baby then leaving, don't picture a snowy cozy scene with fuzzy reindeer and animals around the people like a Disney movie. It's not happily ever after in the leaving of wise men, mad men from Herod come to kill babies! This family isn't walking in a winter wonderland...it's running for their life in a warzone! They start out in a cave, there was no room in the inn, and now the family is homeless refugees who have to flee their country to a whole other continent for asylum. We don't know how long they lived in NE Africa in Egypt, I think less than 2 years based on v. 20 and date scholars believe Herod died, but God provided for Joseph's family in a foreign land by gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Let's just pause there for a moment by way of application: the Magi didn't know Joseph and Mary would probably be jobless for months in Egypt, they had simply followed God's leading and brought gifts to honor the Lord. But this should encourage us that God knew exactly what they needed and gave them

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what they needed financially and in every way for their exile in Egypt. He provided it exactly when they needed it, the very night they had to leave.

I can think of my own experience this month 20 years ago when I was away from home at college, my parents in a faraway land (the Philippines), and I had run out of money and didn't know how I would pay for next semester or where I would live if I couldn't pay my tuition, a person I don't know who didn't know my situation gave a needed anonymous gift at the right time.

God knows what will happen long before it does and that's what we see in this story, and may that encourage you in your anxieties about the future. If you're anxious of Obamacare or your finances or the unknown, God knows and His provision, providence and personal care is a big lesson here in Mt 2

That's not just what we see in the first book of the NT, it's what we see in the first book of the OT. In Genesis, Jacob had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel, and one of his sons born to Rachel was named Joseph. In v.

18 of this chapter Matthew mentions Rachel weeping and mourning for her children who had died, and that's applied to the children of Israel who died in Bethlehem in NT times. The Christmas narrative in the Bible speaks to those who have lost loved ones, even tragically, and who mourn that loss. It speaks to Newtown last Christmas (where young children were slaughtered last year this month) and persecuted Nigerians this Christmas and others.

The Joseph of Genesis was persecuted, and people tried to kill that boy. The NT Herod was an animal of a man in killing Israel's sons in Bethlehem. The OT Jacob (aka Israel), thought an animal killed his special son Joseph. But by God's providence, Joseph had actually gone to Egypt and he would live there and would from there deliver Israel from death in a later disaster.

Not only does v. 18 make a connection with Rachel, Joseph's mom in the OT, and v. 15 connects God's Son Israel in Egypt in the OT, Matthew 1:2 also mentions Jacob who was the father of Joseph. Now look at Matt 1:16: Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary [another Jacob with a son named Joseph], by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah

In the start of the OT, God saved his family through Jacob's son Joseph in Egypt. In the start of the NT, Jacob's son Joseph saves his family in Egypt.

One writer explains better than I can: 'Israel wound up in Egypt the first time through violence [when in Gen 37 they] sought to kill a young dreamer named Joseph. God, though, meant it for good ... (Gen. 50:20). The Joseph of old [in Genesis] told his brothers, "I will provide for you and your little ones" (Gen. 50:21). Joseph of Nazareth pictures his namesake [OT Joseph that his dad Jacob named him after] in providing for and protecting Jesus in Egypt. But he also pictures God, the One who brought the people in and out of Egypt, who shields them from the dictator's murderous conspiracies ... Joseph's rescue of Jesus isn't the first time the adoption of a child is tied to the exodus event. David sings about God as "Father of the fatherless ..." [in the context of His leading saved children through the same wilderness from Egypt to safety, Ps 68:5-6]. God shows this is the kind of God he is.'

God's protection of His Son Jesus through Joseph reflects His love for us.

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What Joseph does for this child who would otherwise have no human father is a reflection of what God does for His children, "a father to the fatherless." What Joseph does for this child is much like what God does for His children. Hosea 14:3 says to God the Father: "In you the fatherless finds mercy."

Matt 2:15 I believe is drawing from that broader context of Hosea 11-14 in quoting Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called My Son." The first half of that verse in Hosea says Israel is the child God loved and call His Son. It gives the analogy of God teaching His little one to walk, like a dad and a toddler (v. 3-4). The chapter also talks about when God's future family will come out of Egypt again, 11:11 'They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt'

The chapter Matthew quotes from talks about two exoduses from Egypt. If the NT Joseph is like the OT Joseph, Jesus is also like Moses in the OT:

- Moses in Egypt was also rescued when the king killed male babies
- Moses in Egypt was also adopted, raised without a biological dad
- Moses also had to flee for his life (same terms used in Greek OT translated in Egypt in Alexandria, maybe where baby Jesus lived)
- Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness (as Jesus did for 40 days and Jesus there quoted 3x from the writings of Moses to defeat the devil)
- Moses came back to deliver Israel from slavery, Jesus came back to save from a greater slavery, a greater delivery from sin's bondage
- Right before John 3:16 Jesus said "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (Jn 3:14)

There are many comparisons with Moses and what He did with Jesus and His work as our far greater Rescuer. Mt 2:15 also compares Jesus to Israel:

- "Out of Egypt I called My Son" was originally a reference to Israel in Hosea and also in Exodus 4:22 where Moses tells Pharaoh "Thus says Yahweh, 'Israel is My Son, My firstborn ... Let My Son go ...'"
- Mt 2:15 says Jesus is fulfilling that OT pattern or picture of exodus
- Mt 2:14 says Joseph fled at night, just as Israel fled Egypt at night
- Jesus is going through what Israel went through, going into Egypt and out of Egypt and back into the Promised Land, and fulfilling all the typology as well as prophecies, fulfilling where Israel failed. He identifies with Israel. As they were hungry in the desert so was Jesus (Mt 4:2), as they were tempted, so was Jesus, but He was victorious. It's amazing the parallels, but the first and most important truth to us today is this story reflects God's care of His children, all in His Son

2nd lesson of Joseph's story: It Contrasts the World's View of Children

If Joseph in Matthew 2 reflects God and how He worked in the OT Joseph and for His family then, if Jesus mirrors Moses and the Israel God brought in and out of Egypt in those days, then Herod looks a lot like Pharaoh:

- Pharaoh like Herod saw Israel's children as a threat to his kingdom

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- Pharaoh like Herod ordered the slaughter of all young male babies
- But let's not miss parallels in our day like Herod and Hermit Gosnell and his Planned Parenthood center that slaughtered more than Herod

Our world is no less barbaric when people slaughter infants' right outside the womb, like Gosnell illegally or whether they do exactly what he did legally a foot away, whether it's with surgical weapons or swords like Herod used. People kill unborn babies today who threaten their kingdom, career, plans. I came across a Christmas card from Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, a number of years ago, maybe the most chilling card ever

Instead of "peace on earth" the card says "choice on earth" (choice to abort).

That's as offensive as a Happy Hanukkah card with a swastika on it to a Jew, but we need to remember we're not in a winter wonderland, we're in a war. That card reflects an age-old hostility the serpent and his seed has always had with God's family since Gen 3:15. He's a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44). It's what we see in hateful Kings of Egypt and in Haman wanting to exterminate the Jews and in Herod and in Hitler and Hamas. Rev 12 says the devil stood before a woman who seems to represent Israel so "when she gave birth he [Satan] might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations...the woman fled into...where she had a place prepared by God...So the dragon was enraged with the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her children..." (v. 4-7, 17).

Herod's reflecting his father's kingdom when Matt. 2:16 says Herod was "enraged and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem..."

Russell Moore wrote "Joseph of Nazareth vs. Planned Parenthood." It says 'At the very rumor of [Christ's] coming, Herod – the Planned Parenthood of his day – vows to see him dead ... [then the book shows from other parts of Matthew how the powers of darkness] hate babies because they hate Jesus. When they destroy "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40, 45), the most vulnerable among us, they're destroying a picture of Jesus himself ... They are grinding apart Jesus' brothers and sisters (Matt. 25:40). They are also destroying the very picture of newness of life and of dependent trust that characterizes life in the kingdom of Christ (Matt. 18:4) ...

Herod loved his power; so he raged against babies. In the middle of it all stood Joseph...[now listen to the application Moore gives] It's easy to shake our heads in disgust at Pharaoh or Herod or Planned Parenthood. It's not as easy to see the ways in which we ourselves often have a Pharaoh-like view of children rather than a Christlike view. What God calls blessing, we often grumble at as a curse – and for the same reason those old kings did, because they disrupt our life plans. Our "kingdom" may be smaller than that of those old kingdoms, our pyramids and monuments less enduring, but it's all still there. [He says] I'm not arguing that parents should have as many children as biologically possible...not arguing that every family is called to adopt... I am suggesting, though, that we look at some of the ways in which we refuse to see blessings in something as noisy and frustrating as children ...[he says if more Josephs step up to care for pregnant teens, fatherless kids maybe] next Christmas there'll be one more stocking at the chimney ... a new son or daughter who escaped the abortionist's knife or the orphanage's grip [or foster system] to find at your knee the grace of a carpenter's son.

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Let's follow the footsteps of the other man at the manger, the quiet one. And as we read the proclamation of the shepherds, exploding in the sky as a declaration of war, let's remind a miserable generation there are some things more joyous than choice.' Like the gospel's good news of great joy.

Our 3rd and final point: Man Can't Stop King Jesus and His Gospel for All

We could say it another way: Sinful Man Can't Stop King Jesus or Sinful Governments or Rulers Can't Stop King Jesus (Herod was all of the above!).

Herod tried to put an end to the newborn King, but Herod comes to his own end instead in v. 19. Those who curse the Messianic seed of Abraham will be cursed as what Genesis promised, so God curses Herod who dies instead. The opposition to King Jesus all ends up fulfilling prophecy (v. 15, 18, 23).

Isa 9:6 'unto us a son is born...and the government will be on His shoulders.'

When v. 16 says King Herod "became very enraged" it sounds like Psalm 2:

1 Why do the nations rage ... 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed (ESV, OT name for Christ, counsel together sounds a lot like Mt 2:4 and 7)

[Acts 4 quotes that and applies it to Christ and the Herod alive then]

Ps 2:4 says God just laughs at puny man's attempts to stop Christ the King. He says in v. 6 of that Psalm: "I have set my King on Zion" and the Father says to Him in v. 7 "You are my Son" and God promises His son nations as His inheritance from all the world as a gift (v. 8). That's His Christmas gift.

The Son would receive a gift as an inheritance of people from every nation.

It's for all who receive the gift of salvation. We get a preview of it in Mt 2 as Magi from the East (possibly Persia) come to worship the King and then when Jesus goes down to NE Africa. He may have learned to walk and talk there as a toddler, but even before that, Mt 1 shows God's multi-ethnic plan with a genealogy including some non-Jews and former enemies of the Jews

Joseph did you know? Did you know your Jewish family tree has some blood in it from people groups who had bad blood toward your people? Did you know Herod was Edumean, a descendant of Esau your forefather Jacob's twin brother? The Edomites have been enemies of Israelites since way back in the OT, and King Herod is of Edomite ancestry, but Joseph did you know one from Herod's household later will become a Christian leader (Acts 13:1) Joseph did you know your Egypt trip teaches us God's plan for all people?

In the start of the OT, God saved his family through Jacob's son Joseph in Egypt, and now in start of the NT, Jacob's son Joseph saves his family with the baby who would be the Savior of all the families of the earth in Christ!

Listen to God's promise to the OT Jacob "in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 28:15 NKJV, our recent study).

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How do we receive this blessing, this gift of salvation at Christmas? In your bulletin is a handout I also used last year in part 1 of this message and it's a message that never changes. First, we need to be saved from God, from His wrath that is far greater than Herod's. #2, we must be saved by God, through God the Son. #3. we must receive it by grace through faith in Christ's work, not trusting our works. Flee to Jesus in faith, not to Egypt but to eternal life. Trust in your heart His death and resurrection for you, confess Him as Lord.