

# **The Advent of the King**

## **The Anger against the King**

*Matthew 2:13-18*

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# The Anger against the King

## Scripture

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. For this season of Advent I am preaching a series of sermons titled, “The Advent of the King,” which is based on Matthew’s Gospel chapters 1 and 2.

The first week we examined “The Ancestry of the King” in Matthew 1:1-17, and learned about the human ancestry of Jesus.

The second week we examined “The Arrival of the King” in Matthew 1:18-25, and learned about the divine ancestry of Jesus.

The third week we examined “The Adoration of the King” in Matthew 2:1-12, and learned about different responses to Jesus.

Today, we will examine “The Anger against the King” in Matthew 2:13-18. Let us read Matthew 2:13-18:

**<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “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.”**

**<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”**

**<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**

**<sup>18</sup> “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.” (Matthew 2:13-18 (NIV))**

## Introduction

The apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel in order to show that Jesus really was the long-expected Messiah, who was born king of the Jews.

Since Matthew was writing for a largely Jewish audience, his book is filled with facts that would interest them. John MacArthur points out in his commentary on Matthew that Matthew gives several evidences of Jesus of Nazareth's legitimate, unique, and absolute royal right to the throne of David.

In Matthew 1 we see the evidence of Jesus' royal genealogy. Jesus was descended from King David and was heir to his throne.

The next evidence, also in Matthew 1, was of Jesus' supernatural conception and virgin birth. Jesus' deity was established by virtue of his being supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The third evidence in Matthew 2 is the testimony of the Magi, who came to worship Jesus and give gifts to "the one who has been born king of the Jews" (2:2). The Magi traveled a great distance to recognize and honor a king who was largely rejected by his own people.

The next evidence of Jesus' kingship is shown in a negative way through the antagonism and hatred of Herod. Herod's devious scheme to discover and destroy this unknown baby shows his fear that the Magi's declaration about the child could be correct, and gives unintended testimony to Jesus' true royalty. Herod knew that he himself was a usurper to the throne on which he sat only by virtue of Rome—who ruled Judah only by the "right" of military force. Herod was an Edomite, not a Jew, and had no legitimate claim to be the Jew's king. He therefore feared and hated even the suggestion of a rival claimant. But even the hatred of the false king gave indirect testimony to the identity of the true king.

The fifth evidence of Christ's kingship given in Matthew 2 is presented through four fulfilled messianic prophecies. Some three hundred and thirty Old Testament predictions concern Jesus Christ. Matthew highlights about fifty prophecies throughout his Gospel.

In Matthew 2 he points out four of those prophecies that were fulfilled during Jesus' infancy. There is no reasonable possibility that even those four—much less all three hundred and thirty—could have been fulfilled accidentally in the life of a single individual. That fact in itself is overwhelming evidence of God's sovereign control of history and of the utter reliability of his Word.

Matthew uses the four prophecies as a literary framework around which he presents the events recorded in Matthew 2. Each of the predictions is directly related to a geographical location closely related to Jesus' birth and early childhood. The four locations are Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth.<sup>1</sup>

The first of the four Old Testament passages around which Matthew presents the events of chapter 2 is that of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (2:6; cf. Micah 5:2), which we looked at last week in relation to the visit of the Magi. The other three are given in the rest of chapter 2. This morning we will look at the trip to Egypt and the retaliation during the trip at Ramah. And then tonight we will look at Jesus' return to Nazareth.<sup>2</sup>

## Lesson

Our lesson today highlights the anger of Herod against King Jesus. The anger against the king is seen in Jesus' trip to Egypt.

### I. The Reasons for the Trip (2:13-15)

First, notice the reasons for the trip.

There are two reasons for the trip to Egypt.

#### A. *To Flee the Wrath of Herod (2:13-14)*

The first reason for the trip to Egypt is to flee the wrath of Herod.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, 40.

The visit of the Magi no doubt was a great encouragement and assurance to Joseph and Mary, confirming the wondrous words of the angels to them (Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:26-38), to Zacharias (Luke 1:11-20), and to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). It also confirmed the testimonies of Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) and of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38) about the child to whom Mary gave birth. Even these Magi from the east had been told the news by God and came to worship Jesus and give him gifts.

But the rejoicing was short-lived. No sooner had the Magi **gone** when **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream**. This is the second time **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream**. The first time was to tell **Joseph** that Mary was indeed pregnant through the Holy Spirit, and that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. This time, however, the **angel** appeared to **Joseph** to warn him of threatening danger.

**“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.”**

Just as the Magi had been warned by God not to return to Herod (2:12), now Joseph was being warned by God to flee the evil, murderous Herod.

**So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.**

I want you to notice Joseph’s obedience. Once again, as he had done the first time, Joseph obeyed the angel immediately. As soon as Joseph heard the word of God, he obeyed it. That is a good model for all Christians to follow.

Where did **Joseph** take **the child and his mother** in **Egypt**? We don’t know. However, it is possible that they went to Alexandria because more than three hundred years earlier Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) established a safe haven for Jews in the city he named for himself. The Jewish philosopher and historian Philo, himself a prominent resident of Alexandria, reported that by 40 AD, only a few years after the death of Jesus, that Alexandria’s population included at least one million Jews.

The distance from Bethlehem to the border of Egypt was about 75 miles. And then it was about another 200 miles to Alexandria. Traveling with a baby made the trip slow and difficult.

How did Joseph pay for the trip? It is almost certain that Joseph used the gifts from the Magi to pay for the trip to Egypt and their sojourn there.

Obviously God could have protected Jesus in many different ways. God could have protected Jesus in Bethlehem, right under the very nose of Herod. God could have blinded Herod and his soldiers to the whereabouts of Jesus. God could have done a number of other things to protect Jesus from harm. But, as is so often the case, God used ordinary means to bring about his extraordinary purposes. Jesus and his family had to undertake a very arduous journey to Egypt. They had to undergo many difficulties and hardships, just like everyone else.

But God's plans are not without purpose. This brings us to the second reason for the trip.

*B. To Fulfill the Words of Hosea (2:15)*

The second reason for the trip to Egypt was to fulfill the words of Hosea.

Matthew tells us that Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed in Egypt **until the death of Herod**. It is possible that they stayed there only a few months, at the most. Perhaps Jesus was a young toddler, having just started walking by the time they left Egypt. We don't know any details about the stay in Egypt.

But Matthew does now give us the primary reason for the family's trip to Egypt. He says, "**so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'**" (2:15). These are the words of the prophet Hosea, recorded seven centuries earlier in Hosea 11:1. But what do these words mean?

As John MacArthur says, "The Old Testament writers were the Lord's spokesmen. Just as they had no way of knowing, apart from divine revelation, that the Messiah would be born in Bethle-

hem, they had no other way of knowing that He would live awhile in Egypt. The flight to Egypt was one more piece of divine evidence that Jesus was God's Son, the promised Messiah."<sup>3</sup>

The reference to "my son" in the book of Hosea was to the nation of Israel. It was a historical reference to what God had done when he delivered his people, whom Hosea collectively calls "my son," from the bondage of Pharaoh and brought them to the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses.

Matthew shows that Jesus' return from Egypt was pictured by God calling Israel from that same country many centuries earlier. The Exodus, therefore, was a type of Jesus' return from Egypt with Joseph and Mary. Commentator Craig Blomberg puts it well when he says, "Just as God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt to inaugurate his original covenant with them, so again God is bringing the Messiah, who fulfills the hopes of Israel, out of Egypt as he is about to inaugurate his new covenant."<sup>4</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, God's plans are not without purpose. God is in sovereign control of all the events of history. God was orchestrating every single event in the life of Jesus in order to show that he really is the promised Messiah, the king of the Jews.

## II. The Retaliation during the Trip (2:16-18)

Second, I want you to notice the retaliation during the trip.

### A. *The Purge of Herod (2:16)*

Observe the purge of Herod.

Matthew says that **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**

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Blomberg, vol. 22, *Matthew*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), 67.

**years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.**

The Greek text for the phrase translated, “**he was furious,**” indicates that Herod was enraged, livid, and completely beyond control. MacArthur notes that “Herod’s crime was made even more vile and heinous by the fact that he knew that the Child he sought to destroy was the Messiah, the Christ. He questioned the chief priests and scribes specifically about ‘where the Christ was to be born’ (2:4). He arrogantly and stupidly set himself against God’s very Anointed (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22).”<sup>5</sup>

Have you ever wondered how many baby boys were killed **in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under?** I used to think that there were hundreds of boys killed. But, most likely, given the small size of Bethlehem, which even today numbers only about 20,000 people, there were perhaps no more than twenty boys killed. Although, as one commentator noted, that even killing one boy was too many.<sup>6</sup>

This slaughter of the boys is mentioned only here in the biblical record. Even the Jewish historian Josephus (37-c100 AD) did not mention this wicked act of killing innocent babies. But it is not surprising that he and other secular historians overlooked the death of a few Hebrew children in an insignificant village, for Herod’s infamous crimes were many. He put to death several of his own children and some of his wives whom he thought were plotting against him. Emperor Augustus reportedly said it was safer to be Herod’s sow (i.e., pig) than his son, for his pig had a better chance of surviving in a Jewish community. In the Greek language, as in English, there is only one letter difference between the words “sow” (*huos*) and “son” (*huios*).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, “An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire ‘BE’ Series”—Jkt. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Mt 2:13.

<sup>7</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:23.

*The Pulpit Commentary* notes that the boys who were killed in Bethlehem “were martyrs in deed, though not in will.”<sup>8</sup> In a sense, they died for the sake and cause of Christ.

*B. The Prophecy of Jeremiah (2:17-18)*

Notice that the purge of Herod was in order to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Of course, Herod had no intention of fulfilling prophecy, but God was in sovereign control. And Matthew notes that **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” (2:17-18).**

In its original context, in Jeremiah 31:15, Jeremiah depicted the lament of mothers in Israel bewailing their sons led off into exile. Already a sense of the recapitulation of history appeared in Jeremiah’s time in that the mothers of Israel were personified as “Rachel,” the mother in the days of the patriarchs whose sons Joseph and Benjamin had also been threatened with being “no more” (i.e., carried away into Egypt; cf. Genesis 42:36). Now Matthew applies the passage to the mothers in first-century Israel in anguish over the babies Herod massacred.<sup>9</sup>

Though Matthew does not mention it here, because he is emphasizing the tragedy of the massacre, the passage he quotes from Jeremiah continues with a beautiful word of hope and promise in Jeremiah 31:16: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ declares the LORD. ‘They will return from the land of the enemy.’” Within a few generations, God brought his people back from Babylon. And one day he will bring all his chosen people back from captivity to Satan. “And so all Israel will be saved,

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<sup>8</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary: St. Matthew Vol. I*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Craig Blomberg, 68.

as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins” (Romans 11:26-27; cf. Isaiah 27:9; 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:33-34). But before that great and wonderful day, disobedience, rejection, and tragedy would continue in Israel. The massacre of the little boys in Bethlehem signaled the start of terrifying conflict.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The main lesson to learn from this passage today is that God is in providential control of everything.

Question 11 in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What are God’s works of providence?” And the answer given is, “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”

Try as he might, Herod’s anger against Jesus resulted not in the elimination of Jesus but rather in the fulfillment of prophecy. God was orchestrating all of the events surrounding Jesus’ birth and infancy to carry out his own plans.

You can trust God to carry out all of his perfect purposes in your life. If you are a Christian, you know that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Whatever your situation, whatever your circumstance, submit yourself to God and to his purpose for your life.

If you are not yet a Christian, I urge you to cry out to God for mercy and forgiveness. You are in the most perilous danger. If you do not turn from your sin, your fate is the same as that as Herod. Herod died in opposition to Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of sinners. And Herod is in eternal torment and anguish in hell because he rejected the Savior.

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, 45.

I urge you to repent of your sin. Think of all the ways in which you have broken God's Law, and confess it to God.

Then, trust in Jesus as the One who has been sent by God to pay the penalty for all your sin and to procure a place in heaven for you. Do it today! Don't delay.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, today we notice the anger against the King as it is seen in King Herod.

We thank you so much for your providence in protecting Jesus from the anger of King Herod. We believe that your works of providence are your most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all your creatures, and all their actions. Herod's fury was no match for your providential care of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you still providentially care for your people today. Help us to submit ourselves to you in all things.

I pray for those who are not yet Christians. Preserve them from the destiny of Herod. Cause them to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings and Savior of Sinners.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Give thanks today for the providential care of God as seen in the anger against the king. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.