

Matthew 2:13-23 The Christ-Child in Danger Falls OPC PM Dec. 25, 2022

We suffer from Christmas amnesia. We forget the story of Christmas and its power!

Here is a quick self-test. We have forgotten the power of Christmas story if we have fallen into the false trap of thinking that recent tragedies can dampen Christmas. For example, if you have a recent death in your family, it “ruins” your Christmas. No! If we believe that, we have failed our self-test and we have forgotten the power of Christ’s coming.

If we were to look under the Christmas trees in living rooms of those families that lost a loved one this past week, and we were to see unopened gifts, we could get sad, sure. But Matthew draws our attention away from looking under a modern Christmas tree, instead to look again under another ancient tree. We must look under the tree of Calvary, and see the blood of Jesus, spilled so that we can live forever.

Let me remind you of the Christmas story as we find it in the Gospel of Matthew. The history of the coming of Jesus into the world began with a slaughter of innocents in Matthew chapter 2, it continued with the slaughter of the innocent John the Baptist in chapter 11, and ends with the slaughter of the Innocent One Himself at the end, Jesus, in chapter 27. Of course, He rose again. God sympathizes with victims. God also judges the agents of violence. God gives us perspective.

The true Christmas story is impervious to tragedy.

Christmas is the answer to tragedy for every Christian, because the presence of Christ engulfs and redefines our tragedies!

What is the promise of protection? It is a forever promise. We do not judge forever by contemporary events. We judge forever by God’s actions at the manger, and the pathway to Egypt, and the cross, and the empty tomb.

**Our Father in Heaven fulfils what He promised in protecting His children through the coming of His Son.**

**For what things can we trust God?**

**1. For salvation through the coming of His Son. (v.13-14)**

Angels were very busy around the time of Jesus’ birth! As we know from the Gospel of Luke, it was angels who announced the coming of Jesus to the Shepherds. As we know from the Gospel of Matthew, there were assignments for angels in helping Joseph to protect the baby Jesus!

In verse 12, we were told that Joseph and his little family, (the Child and His mother Mary), were on the run from Herod’s murderous plot. In verse 13, Joseph heard the angel loud and clear when the angel said, “...*flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you...*” I like how the New King James Bible puts it, “*Stay there until I bring you Word...*” Joseph must wait for the Lord’s Word before he makes a

move. Sure enough, in verse 14, the godly man Joseph did exactly as the angel had told him to do. Safety comes in waiting until we have our marching orders.

God's greater purpose is revealed in this - to give us salvation and safety in His Son. Consider the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 10:29, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father....you are worth more than many sparrows."

Two poets wrote about knowing that God desires our salvation and safety, "Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to You, with my empty cup, uncertain, in asking any small drop of refreshment. If only I had known You better, I would have come running, with a bucket."

## **2. For fulfilment of God's good intentions in the coming of His Son, despite the bad intentions of men. (v.15-18)**

In verse 15, we know that Joseph remained where the angel told him to remain. And that continued until the threat was gone. Herod died. Why was Joseph in Egypt with Jesus? To show the path to exile and back. And to fulfil the prophecy in Hosea 11:1, "*Out of Egypt I called My son.*"

But back to the time of Herod in verse 16, how did Herod react when instead of tricking the wise men, the wise men tricked Herod? Herod was furious! Herod was murderously furious. Herod sent an order that killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under. Because that was the time frame that the wise men had revealed for the birth of the Christ-Child!

In verses 17-18, Matthew again quotes the Old Testament. This time he uses Jeremiah 31:15, of Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were no more. Rachel was the wife of Jacob, the great patriarch, third in line after Abraham and Isaac. In Genesis 35:19, we read that Rachel was buried near Bethlehem, which is where these children were later being slaughtered. Now Jeremiah, when he wrote these lines about Rachel weeping, was writing primarily of Jerusalem being led into captivity, leaving the land where Rachel lay buried. In a figure of speech, Jeremiah equated the name of the patriarch's wife with the very land of God's promise. For the Old Testament writer, Rachel personified the land and so the picture was Rachel weeping for the children who should remain in their homeland, but cannot, because they are being taken away as slaves.

Here, the New Testament writer Matthew picked up the Old Testament writer's image of Rachel weeping for her children, also known as Jacob's children, or Israel's children, and Matthew applied this image to the contemporary attack. Hopelessness in one lifetime feels like hopelessness in other lifetimes, whenever it is found. There was hopelessness in Bethlehem again because of Herod, for Bethlehem's hope for the future died when its children were killed. God, in fulfilment of His good intentions for these very slaughtered children, led Joseph

and Mary and the child Jesus in an escape out of Bethlehem. The answer to hopelessness is to turn to God and trust in God's plan and God's good intentions. God's intentions always overpower the intentions brought on by man's evil plans.

Why didn't God save all the baby boys of Israel? Wait. Let's not lose perspective on what Matthew is showing us. Let's not focus on the death of these baby boys, but rather focus on what God is doing through His Son. Despite the bad actions of men like Herod and the next Herod and later, a man named Pontius Pilate, God was fulfilling an intricate plan that saved all the children of Israel in all the ages who would believe in Christ. Let's not get stuck pitying these boys and their mothers/fathers and families. Instead, let's pity Herod! As always, when it comes to an attack on God's people, we recognize that God's good intentions are always carried out to bless His people, and judge their enemies. Why didn't God physically save those baby boys in Bethlehem? Because God had better plans than we can ask, think, or imagine for those baby boys and their parents.

Romans 8:31b, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

So we don't weep for the children of God who are under attack. We weep for the attackers. After Jesus had been arrested, tried, beaten, and was being led away to crucifixion, Jesus turned to the unbelieving women wailing for Him as the object of persecution and Jesus said in Luke 23:28, *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."* Jesus was victorious. Because of the victory of the Son of God, there is no need to weep for any of God's children. God's good intentions can reverse death, and can wipe away every tear from our eyes. God's power secures God's good intentions for us.

We can trust God fully, despite what attacks people bring against us. Dr. J. Gresham Machen wrote, "Has it never dawned on us that God is valuable for His own sake....If we value God for His own sake, then the loss of other things will draw us all the closer to Him."

### **3. For ongoing protection for all His children through the coming of His Son. (v.19-23)**

In verse 19, we now fast forward again to the moment when Herod would die. At that time, it became safe for Joseph to take the Christ-child Jesus up out of Egypt. So, the Lord's angel again appeared in a dream and gave instructions to Joseph. This time it was the opposite. Verse 20, *"...Rise, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."*

In verse 21, Joseph obeyed.

In verse 22, Joseph feared going to Judea. There was good reason for Joseph to be fearful in Galilee. After Herod's death, Herod's kingdom was split up into three parts. The new ruler over Galilee was Archelaus, who began his reign by slaughtering three thousand influential people. So, another warning came in another dream to go to Galilee. Verse 23, we are told that this was how Jesus

ended up in Nazareth, so that Jesus could be called a Nazarene. God equipped Joseph with what he needed to take care of God's Son. Joseph had the required integrity, piety, and wisdom.

**Conclusion:**

1. Reorient your weeping according to the coming of Jesus. We have been told to adjust our rejoicing, right? Joy to the World! But the opposite is also true. We are being told to adjust our weeping. What causes you to weep? That changes for Christians who are growing! We re-orient our weeping! We stop weeping for believers who die. We only weep because we miss them. We are comforted by the Son of God, whose blood was shed for us to have an eternity to see our Christian brothers and sisters again. So, what is left to weep for? What is left to weep for at such an intensity that we refuse to be comforted? We weep for those who do not know our Jesus, who came at Christmas to save us. We weep for those who must stand at His judgment seat. Application from this study is to re-orient your weeping according to Christmas priorities.

2. Trust in the Father – His promise of protection stands. God is on the throne. God knows what He is doing. God did not slip. We don't bring God into our own court of judgment, and question why God let these baby boys die, for example. Instead, we bring ourselves into God's realm of promises made, and promises kept. We will never figure out the full plans of God. We ought to trust, when things seem to go haywire. Also, even on a seeming normal day, God will not always do what we were expecting. We have to learn to stop living by our own set of expectations, and start living according to pure trust. God does not follow our assumed outcomes. Our God is not comfortably predictable to us. We trust and rest in His care, even when we are not informed about what God is doing, why God is doing it the way God is doing it, and God's timing. Here is the thing to consider - if we only rest in God's promise and care when we understand, there will be way too many times that we don't rest. We have to learn to rest in God's promises and God's care, even when it is as shocking as having all of Bethlehem's boys to be extinguished. While that was happening, God was rescuing Jesus, who would rescue us. The lesson is clear – trust in God the Father, because His promise of protection stands.

3. Remember this very Jesus who came at the first Christmas, is the same Jesus who is coming again, in power and great glory. Don't suffer from Christmas amnesia. Remember Jesus came, Jesus conquered, Jesus is coming again. We have the final victory over evil, and sin, and death, and the slaughters of innocents that all of the evil men and women have been able to deal out in all the history of the world. All things will be set right. All things will be dealt with in such a thorough and satisfying justice and holiness and righteousness, that all of us will agree with God's actions and all of us will have our mouths drop open with awe at how God sews up the end of the story. You are living in the story. You cannot see the end. You are here tonight on Christmas to celebrate the arrival of our hero of our story. May the world never cease to celebrate Christmas annually, in order to give proper homage, the best way we can, to the One who came for us, and the same One who is coming back for us. The last chapter of history is not yet written. God writes the last chapter, and that is the forever chapter. Do you know what the transition point is between our lives now and that forever chapter? The coming of Jesus. The second coming of Jesus, that is. All you need to remember is this one simple truth. Very simple. It is 3 words and I'll say it 3 times. It really is what you are supposed to learn from a full study of Christmas, and a full enjoyment of life in a violent world. One simple truth. 3 words, 3 times. Ready? Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming.

Let me read the last two stanzas of our last Christmas carol this Christmas.

Holy Jesus, ev'ry day  
Keep us in the narrow way;  
And, when earthly things are past,  
Bring our ransomed souls at last  
Where they need no star to guide,  
Where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heav'nly country bright  
Need they no created light;  
Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown,  
Thou its Sun which goes not down;  
There for ever may we sing  
Alleluias to our King.

