

CHRISTMAS
THE TIME AFTER CHRIST CAME
MATTHEW 2:13-23 (esp. vss. 13-15; 19-23)

INTRODUCTION:

Christmas 2019 is over! For some the tree may already be down (if you even bothered to put one up!)...**the post-Christmas clean up has begun** in earnest! (There is the **pre-Christmas clean up** to prepare for that which is out of the ordinary and then there is **the post-Christmas clean up** to get things back to some semblance of normal once again!)

Much of the Christmas food that looked and tasted so good now adorns our waists! I think I may have slipped into a couple of food induced coma's on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. What doesn't adorn our waists yet, adorns the inside of our refrigerators and maybe even our freezers for later!

Some, if not all, visiting family members have already left to go home to resume work schedules, school schedules, and to get back to some sense of normalcy in their lives.

For some, the excitement of Christmas took weeks to build to a crescendo ... and then "*Joy To The World*", it's over!

Most of us I think have a desire to get back to our routine because whether we like to admit it or not, **there is a certain comfort level in our day-to-day routine** even if at times we might find it boring.

Now, think of what it was like for Mary and Joseph after the birth of Christ!

Some people don't consider Joseph to be a very important character in the Christmas story. **The Bible records some of Joseph's thoughts and dreams, but do you know that it doesn't record anything that Joseph ever said.**

Most of the emphasis is usually on Jesus, Mary, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men. However **the person that I want to focus on is Joseph.**

We are not told what Joseph's aspirations were for his marriage when Mary was first espoused to him and he was getting things ready for the finalization of the marriage. **But, nothing ever really turns out exactly like you plan it.**

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That angel of the Lord turned whatever his plans were upside down in that dream he had that is recorded in Matthew 1:20-21! Think about it... He had just found out that Mary was pregnant and was pondering what he was going to do with that news.

I'm sure it was a relief to find out that Mary was with child of the Holy Ghost however strange that may have seemed! At least she had not been unfaithful to him as he had originally thought!

Nevertheless, **life as HE may have had in mind with Mary was turned upside down. Nothing in their lives would ever be the same again.** That's true for any married couple...that's true for any new parents...but it had to be especially true to be entrusted with the task of being the earthly parents for the One Who is God in the flesh and the Saviour of the world!

In our text, the Wise Men from the east have just visited Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus in a house in Bethlehem. They worshiped Jesus and presented Him with their three gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And now they have departed to their own country by a different route than what they came after being warned of God in a dream NOT to return to Herod!

Joseph and Mary got to bed and Joseph also had a DREAM in which he was warned to immediately flee with his family into Egypt and stay put for further instructions because of Herod's desire to destroy Jesus.

There are several things I want us to see here.

I. WE SEE JOSEPH'S PATTERN OF OBEDIENCE CONTINUE!
Though we don't hear anything from Joseph's lips in the Scripture, his actions speaks volumes.

A. Joseph Was Chosen To Be The Savior's Earthly Father Because He Had Some Godly Character! (1:19)
When it came to choosing an earthly dad (and mother) for Jesus, God was not looking for just any old Joe and Jane!
No...this was a special responsibility that took special people!

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(Scripture calls him “*a just man.*” i.e. *righteous!*)

If you want to be used for great things in your life, be known for having godly character as well as hearing and doing the will of God in your life!

B. Joseph Was Told To Do Some Things The First Time The Angel Of The Lord Appeared To Him, And He Obeyed!

1. **He Was Told Not To Fear To Take Mary To Be His Wife! (1:20, 24)**
2. **He Was Told To Name The Child Jesus! (1:21, 25)**

C. Joseph Was Told To Do Some Things Here The Second Time The Angel Of The Lord Appeared To Him, And He Obeyed Again! (2:13-14)

Joseph did not waste any time. He didn't wait until morning ... he got his family packed **THAT NIGHT** and headed out to Egypt. He took the Word of the LORD from the angel of the Lord seriously!

Now remember, this was originally supposed to be a short trip for Joseph and Mary for the purpose for which it was made—this taxing or assessment by the Roman authorities.

Think about what that meant for Joseph. He and Mary had traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem quite probably expecting to stay only for a few days and then return to Nazareth.

There is no indication from Scripture that they had planned on staying long term or moving here! Their **FAMILY** was back in Nazareth! There is no indication given that they brought a wagon, loaded with their furniture, valuables, and furnishings.

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But they had been here for what probably amounted to an 18 month to 2 year period of time already!

But now in the middle of the night, after just having been visited by the wise men, the angel of the Lord said “Move!”.

Joseph didn't argue with the angel...He didn't ask the angel for a “Plan B”...He didn't complain about the hardship...He didn't wait to try to figure it all out...He just **OBEYED!**

JOSEPH SHOWED A PATTERN OF OBEDIENCE IN HIS LIFE!

How about your life? Does your life show a pattern of obedience such that God can use you for great things?

II. WE SEE GOD'S PROVISION FOR JOSEPH, HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT! (2:11)

You've probably heard this before, and it is true, “*Where God calls, He provides!*” **God wouldn't have told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, without providing for their needs!** Especially when His only begotten son was involved!

They needed money to live off of while down in Egypt...and the LORD had JUST provided it for them through the Wise Men!

The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh! Great timing, huh? God's timing! **God is right on time EVERY TIME!**

Sometimes God provides BEFORE the need arises! Sometimes He provides AS the need arises! But where God calls, we can ALWAYS BE SURE THAT HE PROVIDES!

And we might be tempted to think, “*Yeah, but He did that for Jesus, His Son!*” Let me ask, have YOU been born of Him?

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If so, that makes you a child of God! An heir of God and joint-heir with Jesus Christ! (Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 4:6-7)

JOSEPH'S PATTERN OF OBEDIENCE, GOD'S PROVISION FOR HIS SERVANT...

III. WE SEE HEROD'S GREAT ANGER WREAKING HAVOC!
(2:13b, 2:16-18)

This isn't usually included in most plays depicting the Christmas story.

That's because this is not the pretty picture we like to see and depict—the stories of the angel appearances, the shepherds, Joseph, Mary, the Baby Jesus, the wise men...those are the good parts.

But **Joseph and Mary with baby Jesus having to literally run for their lives by fleeing Judea into Egypt** because of the uncontrolled jealousy, pride, and anger of Herod is NOT a part of the story we like!

And then there is **all this sadness in the families in Judea** because of Herod's jealousy, pride, and anger!

Herod called for the killing of all the children in that area from two years old and younger! Dead babies and grieving families were left behind. It's not part of a happy holiday picture, is it?

Understand that Herod was a mean, vicious person. History has a lot to say about him. Caesar Augustus was quoted as saying that it would be better to be King Herod's pig than to be his son.

Pigs were protected by law ... members of Herod's family weren't. King Herod had already killed 2 of his own sons ... he had them strangled. He also killed one of his 10 wives ... his favorite wife ... because he thought that she had been unfaithful to him (she wasn't!). He then killed her two sons, her grandfather, and even her 80 year old uncle who had once saved his life!

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He also killed his wife's 18 year old brother, because the Jews liked him better than they liked Herod.

Herod even killed his own uncle and his mother-in-law. **So, what were the lives of a few thousand babies in Bethlehem to King Herod!**

The slaughter of innocent children in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of prophecy. (2:17-18, Cf. Jeremiah 31:15)

What does this have to do with "*Rachel*" and "*Ramah*"? *Rachel*, we know, was one of the wives of Jacob who bore Joseph and Benjamin. She was buried in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was about 5 miles South of Jerusalem.

Ramah was about 5 miles North of Jerusalem. It appears that Herod took a pencil and drew a circle around Jerusalem, probably 10 miles North/South of Jerusalem, and had every child under 2 years of age killed in that area.

IV. WE SEE THAT HEROD'S ANGER COULD NOT THWART GOD'S PLAN! (2:15)

God knew all of what Satan's plan would be through Herod and had the Prophet Hosea prophesy in *Hosea 11:1* of this time that Jesus would be carried to Egypt and later brought out of Egypt!

Christ's being called out of Egypt **parallels that of the nation Israel!** When Israel was an infant nation, it went to Egypt to escape death by famine. The young child Jesus went there to escape death by Herod! **God led Israel out of Egypt and God brought Jesus out of Egypt!**

By this time, **Egypt was also under Roman rule**, but Herod didn't have any power there. There were already multiplied thousands of Jews who had fled there to find safety from the wicked King Herod! There were Jewish settlements there...with both synagogues and a Temple. The land that had once ENSLAVED the Jews, God used to now PROTECT the Jews.

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V. WE SEE JESUS CALLED OUT OF EGYPT! (2:19-23)

King Herod finally died in 4 A.D. of a very painful and horrible disease. (Which was not long after Joseph and Mary went to Egypt.)

Knowing he was about to die ... Herod ordered all the Jewish nobility to be shut up in the Hippodrome, and surrounded by soldiers. When word came of his death, they were to be slaughtered. He wanted there to be weeping and wailing at his death ... and he knew they wouldn't be crying over HIS death. He died, but the order was never carried out!

2:19-20 — Joseph had another dream, and the angel of the Lord spoke to him once again!

2:21 — Once again, we see Joseph's obedience. "*And he arose*" ... It was finally time for Joseph and Mary, with Jesus, to head back home!

God had protected them, and now they could return to Israel. God didn't want His Son, Jesus, to be brought up in Egypt. God had delivered Israel from Egypt 1500 years before, and He didn't want His Son raised in that heathen environment.

As they got into Israel once again, Joseph heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, was on the throne. He is said to have been worse than his father! History tells us that during his reign, there was a riot in Jerusalem and Archelaus stopped it by having everybody in the crowd killed. Also, it is recorded that he went into the Temple one Passover, and executed 3,000 Jews. Finally, even Rome had enough of him, and banished him to what is now France, where he died.

2:22 – Joseph and Mary, when they got to Jerusalem in Judea, where Archelaus ruled, thought it best not to stay in that area very long. SO ... being warned by God in a dream once again...they headed North, as fast as they could, to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee.

2:23 – This also fulfilled a **spoken** but unwritten prophecy. Not all prophecy was written, some of it was only spoken.

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Nazareth was a small, obscure town. It was famous for not being famous. It isn't even mentioned in the writings of the Old Testament.

In fact, it was so **INSIGNIFICANT**, that when Philip witnessed to Nathanael and said that he, Andrew, and Peter had found the One Who Moses and prophets wrote about (Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph). Nathanael said, "*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*"

But, that's where God wanted His Son raised.

Conclusion

So, what can we learn from all of this?

1. We Learn That The Safest And Best Place To Be, Is Where God Leads Us!

- The Wise Men followed the star that God put there to guide them, and it led them to the Christ-child.
- The Wise Men followed God's instructions in a dream thereby giving Joseph opportunity to evacuate his family safely!
- Joseph followed the Angel's instructions that he received in a dream, and escaped Herod's wrath by going to Egypt.
- Joseph followed God's instruction that he also received in a dream, and escaped the wrath of Herod's son.
- The safest place one can be, is in the center of God's will. Whatever path you take in life, God knows where it will lead. How much better to follow the path that He leads you down.

2. We Learn That God's People Aren't Exempt From Troubles!

We see all the trouble and even the suffering that Christ's First Coming brought about:

- Mary delivering Jesus in less than pristine conditions.
- Joseph and Mary with Jesus, fleeing for their lives.

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- Multitudes of innocent babies killed by Herod the mad-man!
- So many families in Judea dealing with loss of their innocent ones!

3. We Learn That, Whatever Our Circumstances In Life May Be, God Is Always In Charge And Is Always With His Children As He Accomplishes His Will!

That's not to say that we'll never have to experience bad things or hardships along the way! BUT ... whatever comes our way, God is in charge and it is best to rest safely in His Word and in His Will!

We can see how God was in charge in the first coming of Jesus! If we look, we can see His hand in our day guiding things to accomplish His will again! And even if we can't seem to figure out what God is doing, we can still safely trust in Him as His children!

Joseph and Mary didn't have their baby in Bethlehem and then "*live happily ever after*". That happens only in fairy tales and is **NOT** real life in this sin cursed world!

Their dreams of going back to Nazareth to live a quiet and peaceable life, were postponed for a few years. No doubt, their life was nothing like they had planned ... or expected. But God was with them EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!

Maybe you are experiencing some "*Post-Christmas Blues*". Maybe your Christmas wasn't all that you expected or hoped for.

But GUESS WHAT? God is still in charge! He didn't leave Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem to go it alone and figure it out for themselves.

He didn't leave them in Egypt to tough it out on their own.

God was with them every step of the way! And whatever is going on in your life, if you are His, He will be with you EVERY STEP OF THE WAY! He's still on the Throne and still in charge!