

Out of Egypt I Called You **Matthew 2:13-23**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't know about you, but there is so much that could be preached about this Gospel lesson. An insecure Herod is threatened by a mere infant, and his vile evil is exposed. He sends people off to kill all the male children two years old and younger.

We could dwell on why God did this, but He didn't do this. A vile, evil man did. Herod is a deranged tyrant consumed with keeping his throne. He was married once upon a time, and his lovely wife gave him two sons. To make sure that they would not overthrow him, Herod had all three put to death. The evil of this act alone led Caesar Augustus to say, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son. The pig has a much longer life expectancy."

And those whom Herod sent were unwilling to disobey their king. Instead, they followed blindly and are also guilty of the shedding of innocent blood.

Will we follow blindly and allow the shedding of innocent blood. How loudly do you speak up for those who are unable to speak for themselves – infants in the womb? You can speak out against the shedding of innocent blood by adding your name to the Lutherans for Life signature ad in the narthex.

Of course, we might ask why this talk of the slaughter of innocents has to interrupt our Christmas celebration on this 10th day of Christmas? Why does such horror have to hamper the joy of the birth of our Savior? Vile evil attempts to take the life of the Lord of Life, but God has the child whisked off to Egypt safe from harm's way, for His time had not yet come. Not yet, but it would!

Herod fails to kill Jesus, because Jesus' time has not yet come: He has much to do and fulfill and endure before He dies. An angel warns Joseph of what Herod is up to; and by the time the soldiers arrive, the Baby Jesus is safely on His way to Egypt. But that is little consolation the following day around Bethlehem. A voice is heard – a lamentation, weeping and great mourning as these daughters of Rachel weep. They refuse to be comforted, and what shall we say, "Don't cry" "It's going to be okay"? Such phrases are so futile as to be patently offensive. It's not going to be okay. They weep for their sons who are no more.

There is no comfort that will take away their mourning; but there is comfort that will give them hope even as they grieve. The "Slaughter of the Innocents" fulfills the prophecy from Jeremiah 31:15; but do not neglect the two verses that follow: Thus says the LORD: "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; For your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border. Your children shall come back to their own border," promises the Lord.

But how can this be? It can be because of the Child who is whisked to Egypt. The King of the Jews who was born in Bethlehem is chosen by God for the redemption of the world. His journey to Egypt is part of His journey to the cross so that, despite the sin and evil of the world, there is the hope of eternal life after death. The One who escaped death that night will go to the cross and suffer the eternal death of all who die.

But not all are saved, so how can these mothers be sure that God's redemption is for their sons? The answer may surprise you: For them at that time, the answer is circumcision. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord declared that baby boys were to be circumcised on the 8th day of life; and that mark meant that they were part of Israel, part of His holy people (Gen. 17:10f). So, in the midst of that unimaginable grief, there was this hope of the mothers: "My son was circumcised, and there God promised that my son belonged to Him; and although he is not here with me, I am sure that my boy is with the Lord."

What if, perchance, Herod's soldiers killed a baby boy who was less than 8 days old? There was still hope: David and Bathsheba's first son died on the seventh day, yet David said he would go to be with him (2 Sam. 12:23). You see, where the child would die before the Lord's plan for man could go into effect, God was not helpless or uncaring. The people would commend the child to the Lord's mercy, because God is a merciful God.

There is no way to make this text into a cheery one, for nothing can remove the horror of Herod's slaughter; but even on that day of death, the Lord was faithful to those sons; and He was faithful to them for the sake of His only-begotten Son, carried to Egypt on His way to the cross.

In the midst of this horrible account, God is at work. He brings about His own Son's escape to accomplish your salvation. God is at work to bring people out of the terror and struggle and vile wickedness that is such an integral part of life in this world. The escape into Egypt is a vivid testimony to us of God's will that even in the midst of our struggles and tribulations in this life, God's work of salvation still goes forward.

With that in mind, we remember this day the "Holy Innocents, Martyrs," those little boys who were victims of Herod's sin. They are innocent in the sense that, though conceived and born in sin, they committed no crime against Herod that deserved death. They are martyrs, ones who testify, because their innocent deaths testified to the hatred that sin has for life, and more importantly pointed to the Innocent One who would die for the sins of the world. And because of Jesus' death, they are holy: They are redeemed by His cross, forgiveness surely given them in that Old Testament rite of circumcision.

The prophecy, "Out of Egypt I called my Son" speaks about Christ. But it also speaks about you.

For a moment, I want you to consider, how well do you know your Old Testament history? Do you remember the Israelites being in bondage as slaves in Egypt? And of course, you remember the whole ten plagues thing, culminating in the Passover celebration with the killing of the Lamb, the blood on the doorposts and lintel, and the angel of death. God brought them up out of Egypt with the power of His mighty hand. He saved them, and brought them to the promised land.

You are also in bondage. You are not in Egypt, you are enslaved in sin, in bondage to the desires of your flesh. It is out of this that you have been called.

Yes, this life will indeed bring death. The vile evil of our sinfulness will be the ultimate ruination of each and every one of us. We may live to old age, we may think that it is fitting for us to die as such.

Whether young or old, God's gift of life was not intended to be taken from us. Death is a consequence of sin, it is that simple.

But death does not have the final word. In our text, even as the lives of many sons were taken from them, the Lord of life traveled the road whereby His life of perfect innocence would purchase forgiveness and life for all those assailed by sin, including you and me.

Some might think it is tough to be in the Christmas spirit with a text so full of horror and death. And yet, therein lies the joy of Christmas! In this Child who fled to Egypt, life and salvation was purchased and given as a gracious gift of God.

By the waters of your baptism, you have been called to be a son of God. Out of Egypt God called you to be His own, out of your sin and death God called you to be His dearly beloved children. You have been called to be the redeemed children of God.

That is the hope that will not disappoint. As this sermon draws near to an end, you may feel a bit more saddened

than when you arrived here, and may thus view this preaching as a great disappointment. That sadness, however, is not the fault of the Gospel; it is a recognition of the death wish of the world. But where sadness comes, cling to the Gospel all the more, for it will not disappoint. Not now, not ever. Even should we be given to endure the grief of a child's death, Christ's life remains for such little ones and for us. Death will, at times, strike the cruelest of blows; but death is already defeated in Christ, who raises both young and old to everlasting life. That life is given to the people of God, to you and to your children, with such simple words as these: "I baptize you, and thus forgive you all of your sins, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Amen