

**St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus: March 19, 2023**  
**“The Eternal Guardian”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It might seem strange to see white in the middle of Lent, when we would expect to see purple, or today would typically be rose. The nineteenth of March is set aside in the church year to remember St. Joseph, given the title, the Guardian of Jesus. Often when we think of Joseph, we think of Christmas; and so it may also seem strange in the middle of Lent to hearken back to Christmas.

The reality of the cross, the theology of the cross, is not an addendum to the story of Christmas. It is not the product of an overly pessimistic former German monk who was obsessed with suffering and death. Lent and Christmas are rightly placed together. They are not understood apart from each other.

The passion of Jesus does not begin with His betrayal and arrest on Holy Thursday evening, but it reaches right back to His infancy. He comes into a world where He is not merely ignored with indifference or held at bay with cool skepticism. But His coming into the universe, which was made through Him, evokes angry rejection. He came to His own people, and they did not receive Him says the Apostle John. Simeon prophesies to Mary that her child “*is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.*”<sup>1</sup>

We see this opposition played out in our text from Matthew 2. This little Jesus “so sweet, so mild” is one who must be done away with, as is demonstrated by the rage of the tyrant-king Herod who would allow no rivals to his throne. Matthew records this rage was played out in the slaughtering of the baby boys—the holy innocents—in and around Bethlehem. Even the weakness of infancy is a threat to the likes of Herod, who sees himself as the author of his own existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:24

As all monarchs finally must, Herod dies. The Father who gave His Son to be the child of Mary is providentially at work to preserve this newborn, helpless Redeemer for another day and another death. Even as an angel had appeared in a dream to Joseph warning him to take Mary and her Son to Egypt where he would find a haven from Herod's despotic madness, so now the Lord's angel comes in a another dream directing them back to Israel, ultimately to the town of Nazareth in Galilee.

In all of this a divine script is played out. Out of Egypt, God calls His Son—the one who will be for Israel a Savior greater than Moses for He will redeem not a nation of Hebrew slaves but the whole world, delivering them by the shedding of His blood.

But until that appointed time when the Father would give over His Son to die, the Son, small and weak needs protection. The Father does for his Son what He does for you, “He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil” is how the Catechism confesses it. God defends, guards, and protects.

But in this work of defending, guarding, and protecting, God uses His masks, His instruments. He uses mothers and fathers. The body of the mother is there to nurture and shelter her child, not to snuff it out as an unwanted parasite. And the father is there to shield and fight for his wife and child, not to wage an abusive war against them.

Joseph does seem to have a whole lot of attention in the story. The annunciation, the angelic announcement made to him is less dramatic than the one made to Mary. Mary is given to respond in a song the church still sings, the Magnificat. Joseph is silent, but he is also faithful and obedient in his vocation as husband and father. He does what the angel tells him to do. He takes Mary and the infant Jesus to Egypt, doing what good husbands and fathers do for their families—providing for them, caring for them, and guarding them.

Then when the danger of Herod is past, he listens to the angel and takes Mary and Jesus back home to Nazareth in Galilee and lives out his days as husband and father. Joseph does not have a major part to play in the New Testament, and he only gets a minor feast day in the liturgical calendar overshadowed by Mary's big day—the Annunciation on March 25 and even more so by Good Friday and Easter now so close on the horizon.

But it is a good thing to remember Joseph, Guardian of our Lord. He was not the biological father of Jesus; Jesus did not have his DNA, but he was father to Jesus, and he cared for his Son, guarding and keeping him with an eye on him who was Father to them both, your Father in Heaven.

From this Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, all fatherhood receives its name. The little baby cared for by Joseph from Bethlehem, in Egypt, and in Nazareth, is the one who makes of us all sons of God through faith in His atoning sacrifice, the fruits of which we eat and drink today at this altar in the new testament of His body and blood

There are times when we are proud to be Christians. There are moments when fathers are proud to be fathers. We revel in events like Christmas and Epiphany. We rejoice in birth and new life and those moments, when we see our children actually “getting it.” We are proud of the light-bulb moments and while encouraging their continued growth, we make sure to enjoy and relish the plateau moments of success.

But that is not all of Christianity; there is also the other side. When Christ was born at Bethlehem, He descended from a royal house and lineage, but the house of David had fallen upon evil days; and the glory had departed from its kingdom. The angels did sing about His birth, but the Holy Child Himself was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger in deep humility. At His circumcision He was received into membership with the select people of God, but it brought Him physical pain, and it was humiliation for Him to be placed beneath that Law which He Himself had established.

When aged Simeon beheld the Infant Jesus, he thanked God for the world's salvation, but he foresaw also the sword of suffering that would pierce the soul of Mary because of her Son in the days to come. Throughout the story of our Savior's life we find the parallel lines of glory and humility leading from the manger to the cross.

When the Wise Men from the East had appeared at Jerusalem and had inquired about the newborn King of the Jews, Herod's first reaction had been one of fear and consternation. In a day when thrones were never secure and rulers were crowned and deposed by whim, by expediency, and by intrigue, the news of another king had been a severe shock to Herod. But his fear and agitation quickly turned to bitter hatred. He first depended on the Wise Men to lead him to his rival for the throne, but when the Wise Men failed to return to him, murderous anger rose and grew.

The hatred of hell burned high, and the enmity of the devil, smoldering since the Fall, flared up against the Woman's Seed who had barely begun His personal campaign to crush the serpent's head. Surely, the lightning of God's wrath could have seared the evil heart out of Herod for His vicious hatred against His Christ, but the Son of God had humbled Himself to endure the hatred of His enemies.

There was further humiliation for our Savior in the manner of His protection against Herod's plot. An angel came to warn Joseph. This pious man at once made anxious plans to fulfill his sacred responsibility for the welfare of the Child. Angels protected the Holy Family against the dangers of the long journey to Egypt, against the lurking threat of robbery and violence on the lonely road, against the heat and hardships of the weather, against the difficulties of setting up a new home in a strange land.

The angels served as escort when the time for the return home had come. Yes, even the innocent children of Bethlehem served the Christ Child in satisfying the bloodthirstiness of Herod and in convincing him that he had successfully eliminated this rival to the throne, so that he would make no further attempts at persecution.

Joseph, Mary, the angels, those children-these were creatures of Him whom they served and protected. He did not need their help. He was almighty and omniscient. They were limited in their powers. Yet humbly He received their services and assumed the weakness and helplessness of a little child whom they must shelter and defend.

But even greater than this was the humility of the flight to Egypt itself. That the Son of God should yield before the persecution of inferior enemies, that He should flee for safety, that He should permit Himself to be driven out, that He should become an exile from His native land and live in a country that was remembered by His people as a land of slavery and oppression - these circumstances combine to make the Gospel before us one of the mysterious chapters in God's book of wisdom and provision. There is a humility and a lowliness here that is amazing and wonderful to behold.

The significance of this is a familiar story is hard to overemphasize in the record of God's people. As Herod raged against the Child, so the world still rages against Christ and His Church, whenever it finds an opportunity. As the Holy Child depended for safety and protection on the care of His creatures, so the Church in our time is served by imperfect human laws and accepts the protection of imperfect human kingdoms, even though it is in itself a Kingdom far higher than any of this world.

As the blood of the innocents satisfied the anger of Herod and shielded the Holy Family against persecution, so to this day human blood, shed in the interests of liberty and, the preservation of human rights, makes possible the continued existence of the Church and its work in this world.

As the Son of God experienced flight and exile as part of His life, so we Christians also are strangers and pilgrims on earth. The Church, and those who preach the Gospel, have many times been driven from one place to another by the enmity and hatred of un-belief. The whole story of the flight into Egypt presents a picture of the humility and lowliness that characterized the life of Christ and that still forms so much a part of the experiences of God's people to the end of time.

However, in the flight into Egypt we behold another example of prophecy fulfilled. While this child was in every way ordinary, He at the same was extraordinary. It was not by chance or accident that the Savior's life moved along from step to step on the way of His earthly journey. Behind it all stood the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God. From eternity God had devised the exact plan by which the world should be redeemed. Each piece was carefully prepared and cut to fit into the wonderful pattern of our redemption.

In smallest detail, even during that part of the life of Christ where we do not first of all expect it, the will of God was at work for our salvation. That persecution of the Infant Jesus was a part of Christ's suffering for our sins. By it, we have been redeemed from sins of hatred and contempt, of indifference and neglect.

The enemies of Christ and their vicious plot all comes to eternal naught. Even as Herod plots, God protects His own. He frustrated the designs of Herod and gave the Holy Family an opportunity to escape. God's hour for the death of Jesus had not yet come. His will must prevail over the will of the enemy. Herod did not long survive the judgment of God. He was stricken with a vile and loathsome disease, and the death of this tyrant was greeted by his subjects generally with relief and rejoicing.

But what of those children at Bethlehem? How does their cruel slaughter contribute to the glory of Christ, for whose safety they were sacrificed? We know that there must have been heart-breaking grief in the humble homes of Bethlehem on that day, but there was great rejoicing in the Father's home in heaven.

Mercifully removed from an evil world before its wickedness had affected them, standing in the grace of God into which they had been received, untroubled by the sense of guilt, these children were now in eternal glory. For these first martyrs in the cause of Christ, it was an honor to give their life, and we may be certain that their reward in heaven shall be great.

Why? Because God always watches over His own. At times, on this earth, His Church, His Bride, suffers persecution and bloodshed. The blood of the martyrs has often flowed freely into the soil of this earth. But never is a martyr's death a sign of defeat and dishonor, never is it a loss or disaster in an eternal sense. It is a Christian's highest glory to suffer for His Lord, knowing that Christ has suffered eternally, what can man do to me?

Despite all opposition, the plan of God must be fulfilled. The Infant Jesus is again led out of Egypt and directed to Nazareth. He comes unto His own. Thus it will finally be with all who follow Him. The path of the Christian may lead through persecution, pain, and grief. It may bring days of suffering and nights of bitter tears. It may lead through dangers and distresses and unto strange and unfriendly places, but in the end the road of the Christian must bring him home.

To us who believe, this story of the flight into Egypt is a comfort in its record of our Lord's humiliation, and a mighty encouragement to perseverance in its revelation of glory. With all its lowliness, it still shows us the glory of our Lord that He has promised to share with us. In the middle of Lent, it really isn't all that strange then to glance back to Christmas, as we look forward to the cross, Christ's death, His burial and His resurrection.

So today, we give thanks for Joseph, who willingly assumed the responsibility of a child who was born of a virgin. We give thanks for Joseph, who by God's grace, guarded that child so that this child would suffer for the sins of the whole world. On this day of rejoicing, may we ever pray,

“We sing our thanks for Joseph, The guardian of our Lord,  
Who faithfully taught Jesus Through craft and deed and word.  
Grant wisdom, Lord, and patience To parents ev'rywhere  
Who guide and teach the children Entrusted to their care.”<sup>2</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> By All Your Saints in Warfare LSB 517:14

**Prayer of the Church**  
**St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus**  
**19 March 2023**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants You have perfected Your praise. Silence the enemy and the avenger. Turn the hearts of all who, like Herod, would despise children or destroy the unborn for selfish gain. Show Your forgiveness to those who are penitent. Give Your comfort to all women who mourn the loss of infants, and fix our eyes on Christ, who for a time was spared, but has shed His blood for our salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, preserve Your Church and look favorably on her ministers. May they be faithful in the preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments to the people that You have entrusted to their care. May they serve as guardians of Your people with pure preaching and Your gifts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Lord, Ruler of all, graciously regard those who have been set in positions of authority among us especially Joseph our president and Kim our governor. Guide them by Your Spirit to be high in purpose, wise in counsel, firm in good resolution and unwavering in duty, that under them we may be governed quietly and peaceably. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, look with favor on all parents and guardians. At all times, let them see their children as undeserved gifts from Your hand. Strengthen them and all who bear the sign of the cross to be teachers and examples of the Christian faith to these and all children, and by the gracious leading of Your Holy Spirit fulfill what we are unable to do. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God our Father, You kept Abraham and Sarah in safety throughout the days of their pilgrimage, You led the children of Israel through the midst of the sea, and by a star You led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Protect and guide those who travel, especially those going on the band trip. Make their ways safe and their homecomings joyful. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Egan, William, and Randy*, bless also those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Ann, Melissa, Nicole, and Ken*. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, graciously regard all for whom we pray *especially the family of Elizabeth Hanson, Marvin, Ruth, Marvin, Carol, Helen, Zoey, Greg, Sandy, David, Jeri, Pastor Jerry Doelinger, Jill, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts*. Guard them in the true faith through the trials of this life to the life of the world to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, in Your Son, You invite all who are burdened with sin to come to You for rest. As we come at Your invitation to Your Supper, preserve us from impenitence and unbelief, cleanse us from our unrighteousness, and clothe us with the righteousness purchased with Your blood. Strengthen our faith, increase our love and hope, and assure us of a place at Your heavenly banquet forever. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, heavenly Father, You allowed Your Son, Jesus Christ, to become a stranger and sojourner in Egypt for our sakes and led Him safely home to His fatherland. Mercifully grant that we poor sinners, who are strangers and sojourners in this perilous world, may soon be called home to our true fatherland, the kingdom of heaven, where we shall live in eternal joy and glory; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**