

Christmas 1 / December 28, 2025

Matthew 2:15

“And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my Son.’”

Out of Egypt I Called My Son

Today is the first Sunday of Christmas, which this year is also the day of the Holy Innocents, commemorating the deaths of the male children in Bethlehem and area. They were children two years old and under murdered by King Herod in an attempt to destroy a potential rival to his throne, the child Jesus. It is an unsavory aspect of Christmas which we tend to by-pass, unless it happens to fall on a Sunday as it does this year. The murder of the holy innocents is part of our gospel this morning, in which Matthew describes the flight of the holy family to Egypt, after Joseph is warned by an angel in a dream that Herod is about to search for the child to destroy Him.

The holy family escapes to Egypt, but an enraged Herod orders the deaths of children within the age range given by the Magi from the time they first saw the rising of the Bethlehem star, a period of about two years. Not everyone welcomes the new born king. The slaughter of the Holy Innocents is a dissonant note in a happy season. It is a harsh reminder of the vicious opposition Jesus faced as the Messiah, even from His infancy. It is a foreshadowing of the death Jesus would die on the cross for the atonement of human sin, for our forgiveness and our redemption from eternal death. God calls us out of slavery to sin and the darkness of death through the death of His Son!

Herod the great must have been an awfully paranoid man to have felt threatened by the birth of a baby. Herod was an awful man. He had members of his own family put to death. Herod was paranoid, but just because we're paranoid doesn't mean someone isn't out to get us. Lots of people would have loved to get Herod. Even a child could be a threat to a king if a popular uprising rallied around him and took him as their cause. When Ahaziah king of Judah died in the seventh century B.C. his mother Athalia seized the throne and made herself queen. In order to secure her throne, she had all the royal family put to death. Those were members of her own family. Ancient royalty could be abominably evil. However, she missed one. The dead king's young son Joash was hidden in the temple. Seven

years into Queen Athalia's reign the high priest brought the child out of hiding in the temple, and organized a successful uprising against the queen and made Joash king.

Herod may have remembered that bit of Judah's history and feared when the magi asked "*where is He who has been born king of the Jews?*" The Lord preserved the line of David from the wrath of Athalia through the protection of the faithful in Judah. The Lord preserved the line of David from the wrath of Herod through the protection of Joseph. He preserved the line of David, so that in the fullness of time the true king of Israel, Jesus would be born, receive the kingship and fulfill the work of universal salvation God promised would come through the tribes of Israel in general and the tribe of Judah in particular. Jesus found refuge in Egypt where the Lord protected Him until the death of Herod. The Lord called His Son out of Egypt so that He would bring salvation; freedom from slavery to sin and the condemnation of eternal death, to all who receive Him as Saviour and believe in Him as Lord.

Egypt was a place of refuge for the children of Israel during a famine that ravaged the ancient near east in the second millennium before the birth of Jesus. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, but by the mysterious working of God, who works all things in the lives of those who love Him for good, he became second in Egypt and in charge of food supplies during the famine. His brothers came for food. He revealed himself to his brothers and then brought them and his father to Egypt for refuge from the famine. Joseph protected his family in Egypt. When Jacob, whom Lord renamed Israel, and his twelve sons went into Egypt they were no more than a large family, seventy or so persons. By the time of Moses, several centuries later, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In Egypt they became a nation. God called Israel out of Egypt. He made them His people through the covenant of Mount Sinai. He called them out of Egypt so that through them, He would make His name known throughout the earth and bring the blessing of His salvation to all peoples.

The twelve tribes of Israel largely failed in the purpose for which God created them. Instead of making the Lord known in the world and bringing His salvation to all peoples, Israel abandoned the Lord for the gods of the nations, even engaging in their abominable practices of child and infant sacrifice. What Herod did to the children of Bethlehem was what ancient religions regularly did to infants and children as an act of worship; which highlights the depravity of human sin and the magnitude of human sinfulness. Israel gave up on the Lord, but the Lord didn't give

up on Israel, or His promise to make His name known throughout the earth through them and to bring His salvation to all peoples through One of them.

Through Jeremiah He promised to make a new covenant relationship with Israel and all nations. Through Isaiah He promised to send a special representative of Israel who would serve Him in faithfulness, make His Name known in all the earth and bring His salvation to all peoples. Out of Egypt the Lord called His Son Jesus, begotten from eternity, born of Mary, adopted into the line of David by Joseph. He is the Son of Israel, who through His sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross, brings salvation to all peoples. Egypt represents bondage to sin, slavery to the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. God calls us out of Egypt to receive His salvation through faith in Jesus.

The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt to rescue His people from slavery to the Egyptians, which entailed great suffering and ended with death. During the Egyptian captivity the Egyptian king murdered the male children of Israel to protect himself; even as Herod murdered the male children of Bethlehem to protect himself. We can imagine something of the despair felt by the families in Bethlehem and region who lost their children to the wrath and unspeakable cruelty of King Herod. We remember the despair that fills our hearts at the remembrance of tragedy and death in our own lives and families. The Egyptian slavery is symbolic of the slavery to sin to which all people are subject, which ends in death. The Lord called Jesus out of Egypt when Herod the Great died. He was called out of Egypt to represent what He would do spiritually in His life, through His perfect obedience and in His death, by offering His sinless self on the cross as payment to atone for the sin of the world. Jesus delivers His people from the Egypt of bondage to sin and the condemnation of eternal death. Because Jesus the perfect son of the Lord, the faithful son of Israel lived, died and rose again, there is hope in our future beyond the shadow of death.

Matthew quotes from Jeremiah to capture the raw emotion of people grieving the deaths of loved ones, saying, *"A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted because they are no more."* If you read the chapter in Jeremiah where those verses are found, you will see that in the very next verse, Jeremiah speaks a message of hope in grief, a message of restoration and life, which began with the coming of Jesus, His death for our sins and His resurrection for restoration. Jeremiah writes, *"Thus says the Lord: 'Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work, declares the Lord and they shall come back from the land of*

the enemy. There is hope in your future, declares the Lord.” Jeremiah’s message of hope will be fulfilled in Jesus’ second coming and the resurrection of believers. Because the Lord called His Son out of Egypt there is hope in our future.

Scripture tells us that the greatest enemies are sin and death. Sin is the power of death. Jesus has taken upon Himself the sin of the world in the sacrifice of His cross, and taken away death’s power over those who believe. There is hope in our future, because Christ who came out of Egypt as a child has overcome the power of death. He releases those who believe in Him from the enslaving power of sin and the eternal condemnation of death. The Lord calls us out of Egypt, out of bondage to sin and the condemnation of death, through faith in Jesus. He promises that all who believe in Him will rise from the dust of death and share in His victory of over sin, the devil and death in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. God open our minds to believe and our hearts to receive the salvation He has prepared for us in Christ Jesus. A blessed Christmas season. Amen