

Why Jesus was born in the first place

Matthew 2: 13-23 (January 1, 2023)

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¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰“Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

Historical Context

The narrative contains many parallels between Moses and Jesus. Just as Moses could have been killed because of Pharaoh’s edict to destroy all male Hebrew infants, Jesus could have met the same fate under Herod. Thanks to divine rescue through the obedience first of the Hebrew midwives and now of Joseph, both Moses and Jesus were kept alive and tasked to save God’s people, one from slavery in Egypt and the other from their sins.

Theme: Why Jesus was born in the first place

Who wants to hear about the slaughter of innocent children while we’re still basking in the beauty and romance of Christmas? This story about Herod’s evil ways – like so many similar stories being told in the news all over the world today – really is another call to remind us about just precisely why Jesus was born in the first place.

This story is about a God who longs to lead and to love people, in spite of the evil and ugliness that exists. Let’s read this story and let’s see a God who doesn’t stay swaddled in that manger for long... A God who didn’t come to be coddled and cared for only when the nights are silent, only when all is calm and all is bright, only when the world is full of joy and peace and good-will.

Let’s see a God who isn’t afraid to get into the ugly, scary, death-dealing mess of our lives in this world. To do anything else – to skip over this part of the story – is like leaving the plastic on the sofa; it’s like never using the fine china; it would mean to leave the greatest gift of Christmas –

God's presence and hope for healing, forgiveness, mercy, and new life in Jesus Christ – wrapped up and underneath the Christmas tree untouched, unopened, and unshared with the world.

In this story we see God as not merely guiding and directing people but we see the very presence of God – the flesh and bones of the Divine – bouncing around in the arms of... strapped onto the back of... nestled and nuzzled at the breast of Mary and Joseph as they risked their lives – and the life of Jesus – on the run, in those early days.

Because this is still our story. Rachel weeps, still, for her children. But God is with us, still, in the midst of life as we know it. And it is the kind of presence that is our strength and confidence, our comfort and our hope as we move ahead into another year that's certain to be full of new struggles and new celebrations, of new challenges and new opportunities to be God's people – in and for the sake of the world – where God's love, born in Jesus Christ, is still very much alive and well and with us as we go; where God's love, born in Jesus Christ is very much alive and well and with us come what may.