

## HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Dec. 14: The Home of a Child Refugee (Mt. 2:13-23)

13 When they (wise men) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

INTRO: The song says, “I’ll be home for Christmas...if only in my dreams.” The song was written in 1943 and performed by my

distant cousin, Bing Crosby, in honor of the troops who were in far distant lands fighting in World War II.

The birth of Jesus was truly an international event. The Wise Men came from the East. They were not Jews, but they knew about the birth of the king. Herod realized that this child could rise up to compete for his throne one day, so he initiated a search. And the Holy Family fled to Egypt, finding refuge there until the death of Herod.

The Coptic Christians in Egypt claim to be the oldest Christian group on earth. They trace their faith back to the visit of the Christ child and his family in this flight from Herod. They can take you to the house where tradition says Jesus lived. They have their own legends about the child Jesus.

The only reference in the Bible to the flight to Egypt by the Holy Family is the one that we have read in Matthew. But there are a lot of “false writings” or apocryphal accounts of this journey and stay. Palm trees bow down to the child Jesus. Beasts of the field pay him homage. Two men enter his life who will later be the thieves on the cross. Many such notions are contained in these writings.

There is a field of toppled and broken statues and idols in Egypt, I have read. At least some Coptic Christians believe that the child Jesus came into that place, and all the idols fell over and bowed down before him.

Local vampire author Anne Rice returned to the Catholic Church in 1998 and penned a novel about the child Jesus in Egypt based on these legends from Coptic Christians. The book, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, is now being made into a movie, apparently, filmed in Rome.

I have never left behind all of my friends, family, and possessions and fled to another country in fear of my life. That’s what refugees do, and that’s what Joseph did with his family.

The Holy Family traveled a predictable course from Bethlehem to Egypt that took them as long as two weeks. Traditional sites of their journey may be seen today in Israel. When they arrived they joined a large community of Jews living in Egypt at the time. A town near Cairo is the most likely spot for them to have settled in.

We do not know how long they were in Egypt. The guesses go from three weeks to several years. My guess would be several

years, since King Herod died and his son took over during that time.

The Holy Family goes back to Nazareth. I will talk about Nazareth next week. For now, let’s think about the phrase, “Out of Egypt I have called my son” (Hosea 11:1), a verse with a dual meaning, as Matthew points out. Moses and the Israelites were called out of Egypt, as a new movie depicts. And Jesus, following the footsteps of his forefathers, also was called out of Egypt.

## **I. Any Life May be Divided into Eras, Periods**

**A.** The Bible commentators have divided the life of Jesus into a set of eras. The infancy narratives make up a significant part of his pilgrimage on this planet.

1. You will look back on your life with a similar lens. You will divide your own life into its eras based on age and place and family relationships and vocation.

**B.** These eras may be developmental. Chronological eras of human development are acknowledged by education, psychology, and sociology. Our motor skills and verbal skills are developing. Our brains are developing. Our personalities are being shaped.

**C.** Early childhood may be the most significant era of development in our lives.

\*\*\*I saw an unfamiliar face in the the checkout line at the grocery store. I asked her if she was new. She said, “No, I’ve been here about three months.” From my perspective, that is new. From her perspective as an 18-year-old, she was an old-timer by now. I asked her if she was a student. She said she was starting classes at Delgado in January. “What are you studying?” I asked. And she said, “Early childhood education.”

**D.** Early childhood is often marked by mobility, transition. Young parents like Mary and Joseph are still trying to find their place in the world. They have their lives before them. They are preparing for years of work and marriage and raising family.

1. Their little ones experience the security of parents who love them. They may not have any stability beyond that family unit. But if Mom and Dad are there for them, that is all they really need.

\*\*\*My own preschool years were just this way. I was born in Minneapolis a thousand miles from my grandparents’ homes. I

lived briefly in Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia, a place I barely remember. Then we moved to El Paso. And when I was seven years old we moved back to Minnesota. Tradition holds that Jesus moved back to Israel, to Nazareth, when he was seven.

E. There is no single “right place” to be on this earth that fits everyone in every era of their lives.

## II. A Strange Place Is Sometimes the Right Place

A. Jacob moved his entire family to Egypt during a great famine in Israel because Joseph had stored up food in Egypt. They could survive the famine there.

1. Egypt was initially a place of refuge for the Chosen People, a safe place where their lives could be preserved.

2. Egypt not only gave them food, but it also became home to them, the Land of Goshen, a place where they prospered, raised crops and herds, and raised their families.

B. Joseph is instructed by the angel to go to Egypt because Egypt is a safer place for them.

1. Bethlehem is on the king’s radar in a big way. Herod the Great always wanted to be the new King David, the greater King David. He built an artificial mountain overlooking the plains of Bethlehem as one of his building projects. They called it the Herodian. It is honeycombed with tunnels. It was a magnificent place. Herod’s tomb is there. He chose to be buried on the upper slopes of his mountain where in his death he could overlook the fields of Bethlehem where David grew up.

2. Herod was determined that no one, including this new child King, would supplant him as the greatest king over Bethlehem.

C. As strange as it may seem, being a foreigner in a strange land like New Orleans could be just the right thing for you.

## III. Regrets Are an Exercise in Futility

A. Mary and Joseph might have regretted their separation from friends and family members, particularly their parents. They might have wished for the support of family members that they lacked in Egypt.

B. Any of us can look back on the eras of our lives and speculate that our family’s might have been better off if we had made different choices.

C. Regrets are a waste of emotional energy, and they are built on faulty assumptions.

1. We assume that life would have been better had we not made what looks or feels like a detour.

2. But we can only live one life. We can imagine another one, but we cannot live it. The life we imagine back home with our family members might have been good, or it might have been difficult.

3. If you leave your hometown, you could regret the separation. If you do not leave, you could regret the lack of adventure and new experiences.

D. REGRET IS OFTEN AN EVIDENCE OF LACK OF FAITH. We are not trusting the God who made us and rescued us. We are second-guessing ourselves and our Lord.

E. We really should not be regretting the way that life turned out for us. We need to make the most of every opportunity that life affords us, including the sojourn in Egypt.

## IV. God the Father Does Not Lose Track of You

A. The Father in Heaven knew right where Jesus was every minute of every day. He provided for the Holy Family in Egypt just as he provided for them in Bethlehem.

B. He is the GOD WHO KNOWS NO BORDERS. He is just as present in the distant place as he is in your hometown.

C. LEARN TO TRUST THE LORD where you live now— during this era in your life.

D. Sometimes it is the later years that feel out of joint, displaced. Even though we may have stayed in one place for a long time, yet things change around us. Friends and family members die or move away. We can remain in one place and experience displacement emotionally and spiritually.

E. Sometimes the church of Jesus Christ that we know and love changes on us. After 19 years in one place, I realize that my long tenure in one place has its own eras just as yours does.

F. WE MUST PRAY FOR THE FAITH to trust the Lord in changing times and seasons of our lives.