

Text: Mt 2.13-15

Our series today skips forward in the Christmas story, missing the journey to Bethlehem, the shepherds, the dedication in the temple, the visit of the wise men (although they will make a cameo appearance in today's message).

This is because our focus is Joseph. We are following the places in the Christmas story where Joseph comes up personally. Rory is going to touch on the little family as they travel to Bethlehem in our Bible study time.

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Have you ever awakened to a ringing telephone in the middle of the night, dreading to answer because you just know it must be bad news?

As I recall, I've received one call like that, and I've given one call like that.

When you get that call, usually there is nothing you can do to help, but you can't go back to sleep either. Your mind is in a turmoil, you think about many things you might have to do tomorrow.

- Book a flight and a hotel
- Book a rental car
- Make arrangements for duties at home while you are gone

In our story, Joseph came awake with a sudden and urgent message from an angel. None of us have had our sleep cut short like that!

Why did the angel come to Joseph that night? This is where the wise men come in. Let's read their part of the story:

Read Mt 2.1-12

Did the wise men suspect Herod? The text doesn't say, but God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod, contrary to their promise. Surely, they were wise enough to take a hint from that warning.

*They left for their own country by another way.*

In the meantime, Joseph and Mary are sleeping after another momentous day. The timing seems to be some months after Jesus' birth — twelve to eighteen months, I would guess.

They had settled in Bethlehem for a time after the birth of the baby. Perhaps Joseph found work, it was just easier than to go back to Nazareth and the setting where their back story was more known.

This day was another of those momentous occasions Mary “pondered in her heart.” The day of the Lord’s birth brought the shepherds; this day brought the wise men and their costly gifts.

The last couple of years significantly changed their lives:

- Gabriel’s announcement to Mary
- The angel speaking to Joseph
- The trip to Bethlehem and birth of Jesus
- The arrival of the shepherds with their grand story
- The prophecies by Anna and Simeon in the temple

After that, there was silence.

No more angels. No more prophecies. Just the necessity of providing for life and limb and taking care of a baby.

And now these impressive men arrived from the east, told them their tale, worshiped their boy — and departed.

When they slept that night, their hearts and minds must have been full of the promises of God, but God had something more for them that very night:

Read Mt 2.13-15

We can understand the confusion and urgency that settled into their home that night, the suddenness of night time travel, and the details that occupy that story.

There is something else here, a link with prophecy, which speaks to God’s plan of redemption and the role that Joseph and Mary played in it. From their experience, let’s consider our own role in God’s plan as we serve him twenty centuries on.

**Proposition:** The part a man plays in God’s plan may seem small, but it is crucial to accomplishing God’s purposes.

## I. What Joseph heard and did (13-15a)

### A. The commanding vision (13)

1. After the wise men departed, the angel “was manifesting” – growing more distinctly in view?
2. Four staccato commands

- a. Get up! (lit. ptcp, but with imperative force)
- b. Take the Child and his mother
- c. Flee to Egypt
- d. Remain till I tell you

The language expresses urgency.

### 3. Explanatory notes

#### a. Why Egypt?

- 1) Pragmatically, Egypt is the closest border to territory not controlled by Herod (about 75 miles)
- 2) Another 100 miles would put you in the heart of Egypt
- 3) Large Jewish community (about 1 million) in Egypt
- 4) Egypt a place of refuge for Jews “on the lam” through history (Jeroboam, refugees after Neb. destroys Jerus., etc)

#### b. The centrality of Jesus

- 1) Note wording: “the Child and his mother”
- 2) Joseph distinctly left out of this formula (emphasizes again the virginal conception)
- 3) The Child put before the mother

“Jesus remains the central focus of the text.”<sup>1</sup>

“The child is named first, as the more important person, and the one endangered; and the whole expression (here and in v. 13) reminds us that Joseph was not really his father.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 66.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, An American Commentary on the New Testament (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 22.

### c. The threat of Herod

- 1) In the bloody politics of the Roman Empire, Herod won the throne of Judea from Augustus by cunning and ruthless means
- 2) Taking the throne, he slaughtered many of the priestly family (formerly ruling in Jerusalem, though he was married to the sister of the high priest)
- 3) Eventually had his brother-in-law murdered, earning hatred of his wife
- 4) Later put his wife and mother-in-law to death (fearing they might plot against him)
- 5) Near the end of his life, put to death one of his sons (who had engineered the murder of two other sons)
- 6) Josephus:

“A man he was of great barbarity towards all men equally, and a slave to his passions; but above the consideration of what was right; (192) yet was he favored by fortune as much as any man ever was, for from a private man he became a king; and though he were encompassed with ten thousand dangers, he got clear of them all, and continued his life till a very old age; but then, as to the affairs of his family and children, in which, indeed, according to his own opinion, he was also very fortunate, because he was able to conquer his enemies; yet, in my opinion, he was herein very unfortunate.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Auburn and Buffalo, NY: John E. Beardsley, 1895), 464.

- 7) The bloody story that follows in Mt 2.16-18 is only found here, but it is consistent with the kind of man he was

Mt 2.16-18 ¶ Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.<sup>17</sup> Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:<sup>18</sup> “A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEeping AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEeping FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”

- 8) Lastly, the words of our text, “Herod is going to search for the Child” may indicate the search is already underway

The Lord warns Joseph “just in time” — the Lord’s timing is always “just in time.”

## B. The immediate response (14)

### 1. The language here speaks of immediate obedience

- a. Joseph got up (same form as prev. vs., but takes the mood of the verb here: indicative rather than imperative)
- b. While it was still night – *i.e.* right away
- c. And left...

### 2. Everything would be thrown into confusion

- a. Waking the wife and child
- b. Gathering what could be gathered quickly (the gifts of the wise men)
- c. Hurried packing of a few things
- d. And off into the darkness of night

## C. The time of waiting (15a)

1. The death of Herod came not too long after – six months to a year
2. The angel said, “Stay till I tell you” (13) — this verse implies the return, setting up the quotation from Hosea

## II. What Joseph's actions meant (15b)

A. The language of quotation is a familiar device of Matthew's

*This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet*

1. Matthew is always concerned with the relation of the New Covenant to the Old
2. Here the language (as translated) seems to suggest to us that the story before us directly fulfills a promise made by the prophet

Hos 11.1 ¶ When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.

- a. The problem is that in Hosea, Israel (the nation) is the clear reference
- b. This produces the bulk of discussion in commentaries [and raises doubts among unbelieving scholars]

B. The way to understand the connection

1. First, "fulfill" has the connotation of "filling up to the full"
  - a. There is a sense in which prophetic words can have a certain sense
  - b. But a later event will fill the words up with more meaning than the prophet saw originally
2. We call this interpretation a "typical fulfillment"
  - a. Matthew (and other NT writers) see Jesus as "the antitype of Israel" — events in his life parallel ancient events and thus have significant meaning
    - 1) 40 yrs wilderness wandering parallels 40 days of temptation
    - 2) Israel the unproductive vine (Isa 5); Jesus the true vine (Jn 15)
    - 3) Israel called "God's Son" whom Pharaoh must let go (Ex 4.22-23, Jer 31.9, Ps 2.6, 12, Hosea, comp. Mt 3.17)
  - b. In fulfilling the OT, not only future prophecies have prophetic significance, but history and laws have significance

Mt 5.17 ¶ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

“Matthew sees striking parallels in the patterns of God’s activities in history in ways he cannot attribute to coincidence.”<sup>4</sup>

“the whole Old Testament is but the bud of the New”<sup>5</sup>

### C. What this means for Joseph

1. Joseph, hidden away in Nazareth, seems the humble *end* of David’s line (Get Down Joseph)
2. God called Joseph to provide a home for the virgin and that holy Child the Spirit conceived within her (Get Up Joseph)
3. God warned Joseph to flee to protect the Child and his mother (Get Up Joseph)
  - a. God could have called 10,000 angels to protect the infant child
  - b. God chose a quiet, humble young man from Nazareth, to flee in the dark of the night, in a desperate rush to escape Herod’s soldiers

My point: God chose to use a humble man as part of his Great Plan of Redemption — a man who would have lived and died forgotten and in hiding otherwise.

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The part a man (or woman) plays in God’s plan may seem small, but it is crucial to accomplishing God’s purposes.

You will most likely live out your life out of the glare of much publicity – few will know your name.

Yet... if you are a gospel worker, you will influence souls for eternity.

<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 67.

<sup>5</sup> W. Sunderland Lewis and Henry M. Booth, *Matthew*, The Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1892), 17.