

Matthew 2:13-23 (NIV)

13 When they 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: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

40-02-04-Herod - Trials and Tragedies at Christmas

Advent, Christmas, suffering, human condition, Incarnation, hope
Matthew 2:13-23

Christmas brings to a sorrowing world the presence of divine hope.

INTRODUCTION: (Text as Scripture reading)

—[On Christmas Day, 2003, at a church camp in the San Bernadino Mountains, a mud slide took the lives of 5 adults & 9 children.] *Bad things* do happen at this time of year. *Most children don’t notice that. Teens notice it more, adults see it often, and seniors see it too often. This isn’t a miraculous season, one immune from disasters (thus my title).* So, what *is miraculous* about Christmas? **HOM.idea:** “Immanuel... God with us.” *Our text tells us that...*

I. Christ Came to a World of Unsafe Circumstances—v.13, 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.”

- A. **Tyrants like “Herod” ignore human rights.** [**Tyranny** is a group-project now: terrorism, persecution, power politics by big business or special interest.]
- B. **In our unsafe world, life & health are threatened** [**Used to be:** AIDS, SARS, Anthrax, Swine flu, Mad-Cow disease; now: Covid-19 & its variants.]
- C. **The Nativity didn’t stop problems from disease or diseased minds, even for Jesus:** “Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

TRANS: Christ’s 1st Advent didn’t abolish *threats to safety*. But **Christmas *did* bring a sorrowing world the presence of divine hope.** It brought *hope*, because, in Christ, *God carried our human sorrows*.

II. Christ Came to a World of Unstable Living Conditions—v.14-15a,

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

- A. This fulfilled **Hos 11:1**, “*Out of Egypt I called my son.*” (**Jesus came to identify with our uncertainty of location in the human condition.**)
- B. Other forces besides tyranny remove people from their homes [**floods, tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, wars, jobs or loss of jobs**]
- C. [We **moved 12 times** our 1st 5 years of marriage.] **Jesus learned what it meant to be homeless—Mat 8:20**, Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

TRANS: [New residents move from *large homes* to *small cottages* or *apartments*; then, to *less space* in the *ALU*, the *SNF* or *MC*. *Sorrow & loss* accompanies each move.] But to all losses and sorrows, **Christ's Advent brings divine hope**, because later, *the Child King born in Bethlehem* promised us, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

III. Christ Came to a World of Unjust Suffering– v.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.*

- A. We sing, "little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes," but a flood of tears came with the infamous "*Massacre of the Innocents*" by Herod.
- B. God foresaw this evil! (v.18 is **Jer 31:15**, "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." [**Rachel's tomb** was near Bethlehem]
 1. Today's parallel to a dead "Rachel weeping for her [grand]children" is the dead *grandma in Heaven* "weeping for her" *aborted grandkids!*
 2. *Bethlehem's children* suffered to rid Herod of what he saw as a *problem Child*, and *aborted children* die to rid people of what is perceived as *social problems*. (None who sanction abortion can call Herod guilty without condemning themselves.)

TRANS: [One Xmas Day, a poor mom with a stillbirth was *stoic*, unable to grieve. I told her that **Christmas brought divine hope to our world of sorrows**. *Her faith in Jesus* would let her see her child *alive* in Heaven.] But what about *Herod*? Do perpetrators of innocent suffering have any *hope*? *Saul the persecutor*, who became *Paul the Apostle*, would say, "Yes, for those who believe!" Why? Because "*Immanuel... God with us*," died on the Cross for **all** sinners.

IV. Christ Came to a World of Social Prejudice– v.23, *and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."* [A phrase not in the OT.]

- A. Because "Nazareth" was a *despised place*, v.23 uses **Isa 11:1** with a bit of *poetic license* to turn a *slur* into a *compliment*.)
 1. [**Russell City**, before its demolition, was a ghetto beside a garbage dump near Hayward, where I grew up. Kids used it as a *derogatory slur*: "You must be from Russell City!"] In **John 1:46a**, when told what city Jesus came from, Nathaniel said, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

2. Social prejudice against Nazareth meant *guilt by association* in **Acts 24:5**, [Paul was being accused]– "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the **Nazarene** sect." (in other words, "*another despised Nazarene outcast just like his leader, Jesus of Nazareth.*")

B. Prejudice and bigotry cause hurt and rejection. ("Jesus of Nazareth" experienced that– **Isa 53:3**, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

C. But Matthew based v.23 on the word "Branch" [**netser** (nay'-tser)] used in **Isa 11:1** AND from which "Nazareth" got its name. (That word proclaimed Israel's *messianic hope*: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots **a Branch will bear fruit**."

CONCLUSION:

–*Trials and tragedies* happen at *Advent, Christmas, New Year's*, and in **all seasons**, but **Christmas brings to a sorrowing world the presence of divine hope**: "a **Branch** will bear fruit." *What's the fruit? Hope, divine hope*, because "*Immanuel... God with us*" came into our world of threatened safety, unstable living conditions, unjust suffering, and social prejudice. He came to be "with us" *in our sorrows!* He came "to destroy the devil's work" of *lies that cause the sins that cause the sorrows!* And He's coming back to *abolish all forms of suffering and sorrow*, for all those who are *waiting for Him*, who are *watching for Him*, and, as Scripture says, "who love His appearing!"