

# THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Derrick C. Brown



## Matthew 2:13–23 ESV

### Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist around AD 50. This is the chronicle of our Lord's flight into and calling out from the land of Egypt. Alongside this, is the sad recounting of the martyrdom of the Bethlehem boys. These narratives are found only in Matthew's Gospel account.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, 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."

- Of Herod, Caesar Augustus once remarked: "It is better to be Herod's swine than his son" (Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, Book II, chapter iv: 11) for Herod was known to have killed his own sons, wives, and anyone else who threatened his reign. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVI, chapter xi).
- Upon the departure of the Magi, Joseph the guardian of our Lord, warned by the angel of the Herod's intent, arose that very night, and hurriedly gathered together his wife and her Son and those expensive gifts of the Magi, and flees to Egypt – the land where the people of God languished under the tyrannical thumb of the Pharaohs; a land the people of Israel remembered flowed, not with milk and honey, but with sorrow and sweat, death and deliverance.
- "[See] the incomprehensibly deep humiliation of the Son of God. Of Him we read in Revelation, 'From His presence earth and sky fled away' (Revelation 20:11). Here we read that this almighty God, before whom the earth and heaven must flee, Himself flees before mortal man. We know that He is the Light of the world, the Sun of Righteousness, the Image of God; yet now we hear that He seeks the protection of night, in order to be safe from the plots of a miserable sinner....

We know that He came to save all men from sin, death, and hell; yet now we hear that God Himself orders a poor helpless man to save Him from death, to bring Him to safety, to rescue Him, the Deliverer of the whole world." (Walther, *Walther's Works: Gospel Sermons, Vol .1. Sunday after New Year: First Sermon*, 63).

<sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> 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."

- In this rushed journey to Egypt, we see the fulfillment of God's Word, spoken through His prophet: "**Out of Egypt I called my son.**" (Hosea 11:1b). What appears as vulnerability, is, in fact, a God who is in control of everything. The Word of God became flesh in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), and according to His will. This very journey to and from Egypt happened according to God's plan for His Beloved Son. Everything is in God's control – even the crucifixion of this only-begotten Son of God. For the Cross was part of God's plan of salvation from the beginning. That scaffold of death, erected outside of Jerusalem, was to be death's defeat. Out of Egypt, by way of Nazareth, to Jerusalem – Immanuel comes to lay down His life for Herod's, for Pharaoh's, for the sins of all men. Because of Jesus upon the Cross, there is now peace on earth between God and men. (Luke 2:14 kjv).
- <sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

- As to the total number of children who died at the evil command of Herod, no exact number is given. The age and area covered in this edict suggest a relatively small

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- As to the total number of children who died at the evil command of Herod, no exact number is given. The age and area covered in this edict suggest a relatively small

number. Whatever their number may have been, the point remains: these boys would not have been murdered if Christ Jesus had not been born among them. While God allowed this evil, He did not bring it about, for God is never the author of evil. “God is not a creator, author, or cause of sin.” (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration, Article I, 7). “[God’s] foreknowledge extends over the godly and the wicked alike. But it is not the cause of evil or of sin. In other words, it is not what causes people to do wrong (which originally arises from the devil and mankind’s wicked, perverse will). Nor does it cause their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible. But [God’s] foreknowledge only regulates this and fixes a limit on their ruin, how far it should progress and how long it should last. All this happens to serve His elect for their salvation, even though such ruin is evil in itself.” (*Ibid.* Formula of Concord: Epitome, Article XI, 4).

- “In such innocence these little children are put to death; this can bring them no harm, but on the contrary a double gain and advantage. They would have had to die at any rate, but now it happens that they die not on account of their nature or their sins, but for Christ’s sake. Of such it is said, ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints’ (Psalm 116:15).” (Luther, *Explanatory Notes on the Gospels*, 9).

<sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: <sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

- “Because the slaughter of Bethlehem’s children and the subsequent mourning played a role in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, it stands as an antitype for the mother of Israel (“Rachel” of Jeremiah 31:15) who mourned when their children were taken from them into exile during the time of the prophet Jeremiah.” (Gibbs, *Matthew* 1:1–11:1, 143–144).

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

- Joseph is again counseled by a Divine messenger. The threat of Herod’s infanticide is over.
- “[Herod, that] miserable enemy of Christ quickly perished, but Christ remained alive. The enemies of Christ still experience this time and again, and they will continue to experience it until the end of time. Even today they conceive the most cunning plans to wipe Christ and His Word from the earth, but all their wisdom will come to naught.... Men can drive Christ away; He forces Himself on none. But they will never push Him out of the world.” (Walther, *Walther’s Works: Gospel*

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<sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

- Heeding the Word of the Lord, Joseph leads his wife and her Son back to Israel, where, in the fullness of time, Jesus will not flee from the hands of sinful men, but willingly lay down His life that we might be delivered from the bondage of sin, a bondage far worse than captivity in Egypt.

<sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

- As Joseph, Mary, and Jesus drew near to Judea, the violent reputation of Archelaus gave Joseph pause, for Archelaus was a tyrant like his father. By Divine revelation, Joseph is directed to return to the district of Galilee.

<sup>23</sup> And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

- There is no direct Old Testament citation that prophesies the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. In fact, Nazareth is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. However, Matthew, in saying “the prophets”, may be alluding to several Old Testament references as to the despised character of Jesus (i.e., Psalm 22:6, 13; 69:10; Isaiah 49:7; 53:3; Micah 5:1). Nazareth held the Roman garrison for the northern areas of Galilee. Therefore, the Jews would have little to do with this place and largely despised it. Matthew could also be alluding to the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1: “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” In Hebrew, the word for Branch has a certain phonetic familiarity to the the word Nazareth. Whatever the case may be, Matthew’s recording of Jesus living in Nazareth finds agreement with the fact that Mary (and we may presume Joseph as well), prior to the Annunciation, lived in Nazareth.



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