

Watchnight service Kirknewton

Reading: Matthew 2:13-23 (NT pages 966-967)

The Escape to Egypt

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.”^a

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.”^b

MP 47 Away in a manger

Sermon

^a Hosea 11:1

^b Jer. 31:15

Our reading tonight is quite remarkable.

It almost cast a shadow over all the joyous events. I mean - that despite God coming to the world, there is a king whose lust for power is greater than everything else, a king who tries his best to dim the Light to the whole world.

But God had a plan and sent the new parents, Joseph and Mary to a foreign country Egypt to escape the king's evil plan namely to kill all the boys under two.

A very large Jewish community lived in Egypt in this period. The coastal road to Egypt from Palestine was not the finest, and Egypt would be even harder to reach from Bethlehem without traveling northward to Jerusalem, one would have to take the poorer route southward to Hebron. By leaving "at night," Joseph's family made their route of departure impossible to trace.

So can you imagine how hard it must have been for Mary, Joseph and the baby, travelling by night?

But God had a plan...

What does it mean to us?

God chose to come to earth and live among the human race. This story highlights the frailty and short-sightedness of the human race. The king's reaction emphasises what we experience on a daily level not only in ourselves but also around us. We know what humans are like. We see it in ourselves, in others all around us every moment of every day. Humans like power. Humans like to be in control while in fact they are out of control! Life is not moonshine and roses just like the first Christmas was not moonshine and roses.

Sometimes we find ourselves also in situations where other people are trying to dim the Light of Christ in our lives. Sometimes events, hardship, illness and broken relationships make us blind to see the Light of Christ. But God has a plan - even if it means that He sends us to unknown places to cope; even if it means a road of hardship and suffering; even if it takes very long.

If you are feeling tonight that you are metaphorically speaking in Egypt, a cold and dark place where you see no light and no hope, remember God has a plan for your life. Maybe you need to go back to the beginning in Bethlehem where the Light of the world started to shine. Maybe you need to get up and trust God again.

I want to conclude with a true story that I read online in a South African newspaper. A minister got an idea just before Christmas that a lot of people in her congregation are facing financial difficulties. She asked session's permission to organise an event where on Christmas day the members would bring food along to church and then share this food with the less fortunate among them. So they invited everyone they could think of which would benefit from this meal, but then on Christmas day only a few turned up. There was so much food and they decided then to start delivering some food to all the institutions and charities. After delivering loads of food, there was still food left over. They then decided to go into the streets and get the homeless and the hungry. The hall was suddenly filled with all the "unwanted people" but with a difference – everyone was eating and chatting and enjoying themselves with no one feeling "unwanted" anymore.

Afterwards a homeless man spoke to the minister and said:"I was once well off but through no fate of my own lost everything – even my wife and children. So I decided to leave everything behind and live on the streets. But life on the streets is hard and I asked the Lord to help me, to give me some assurance that I can go back to my old life and be ok. Then you appeared

and brought me here to the church and you fed me. Surely this must be the assurance I was looking for”

God has a plan for you too....

So take my hand now and let us all go to Bethlehem, the place where we will find the way, the truth and the Light of God! And when we get there, may we take God’s hand and let His light shine in our darkness.

Amen