

December 30, 2007
First Sunday After Christmas

“The Second Son”

Matthew 2:13-23

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." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 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."

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. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*"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."

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 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." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 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. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Sermon

I'm not the best at home improvement projects. In fact, I'm hesitant to even attempt many of the projects I think may need doing because I'm pretty sure I know how the scenario will play out. It starts by picking out the project and talking with somebody who knows about such things and tells me how easy it is to do. It doesn't matter if it's plumbing, or wallpaper or whatever. I get the tools and supplies and dig in. Inevitably I don't have the right tool, or I run short on material and try making due with what's there. I do things in the wrong order and realize it too late, like after the glue has already set. I try to take shortcuts in the directions and it comes back to bite me when I'm sitting there puzzling over the leftover parts. Ultimately, it takes longer than expected, I run short of time and rush things, screw up and the final product is flawed. Typically, I'm left looking at the project with a disappointed feeling, thinking that if I could just do it all over again I'd avoid the dumb mistakes I'd just made and I'd get it right. Next time, it would come out perfect. But it's too late. The job is done. The money's spent. And it's "good enough." The fact is, if I did it over again I'd probably make some other mistakes, or even the same mistakes over again. If I want it done totally right, I should probably hire a professional—somebody who is capable of getting it right the first time.

I bring up this analogy because this kind of thing is alluded to in our Gospel text, although it is hard to pick up on. We are told about how Joseph is told in a dream that he needs to protect the baby Jesus from Herod by fleeing to Egypt. He does so and Matthew writes of it, *“This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”*

At first glance you would think that some prophet back in the Old Testament must have said Messiah is going to somehow come out of Egypt. But that’s not quite right. To get the full picture you have to go back to the writings of the prophet Hosea and see the context in which this quotation comes from.

Hosea 11 begins with these words, *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”* What Hosea is referring to here is the nation of Israel being brought out of their 400 years of slavery in Egypt by the powerful hand of God. The next verse makes it clear Hosea isn’t talking about some holy person. *“The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.”*

By citing this writing of Hosea, Matthew is calling us back to the time long past when God had called Israel to be His people, His son. God had freed them from their slavery by bringing them through the Red Sea. He gave them His law and the tabernacle and the sacrificial system whereby they would set themselves apart from all the nations as His holy people. God told them *“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”* And Israel received all these things with joy and promised to follow only Yahweh and do those things He commanded.

The problem was that Israel did faithfulness the same way I do home improvements, they couldn’t quite stick with the program. It seemed simple enough, but once they dug in and tried to do it, they found they were quite lacking. They couldn’t follow the directions; they were always looking for shortcuts and ways around God’s requirements. In their sin, they simply didn’t have what was needed to live out the devotion God demanded. Worse yet, they didn’t even stick with the project—faith in Yahweh. They went running after false gods, completely abandoning the God who brought them out of Egypt and promised to bless them and remain among them. What Israel made from God’s blessings is far from “good enough.”

But now we have Matthew calling us back to that time while describing the infancy of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. And in this parallel, this joining together of what happened with Israel and what happens with Christ, we readers are clued in to what is going on with Christ.

God keeps His promises. Although Israel repeatedly rejects God, God is going to honor His promise to make them a blessing to the nations. Israel has made a complete disaster of God’s will and brought the punishment of God upon themselves, but God uses them to bring forth someone who is going to take over the project of making for God a holy people. That person is Christ. God sends His own Son to do it right, to clean up the mess sin has made of creation and set things right again.

What Matthew is saying is that Jesus, this Son of God, is going to be what Israel never was able to be. He is going to do what Israel was never able to do. Jesus Christ is going to live a life faithful and pleasing to God without flaw. Far from being just “good enough,” Christ is going to be perfect, unblemished in His obedience, immaculate in His

faithfulness. Jesus Christ is all of Israel boiled down to a single, perfect man able to completely do the will and law of God without fail.

But Christ does more than keep the law perfectly. He keeps the law perfectly for the mankind that failed to do it. He stands in for Israel and all who fail to follow the Lord God almighty in righteousness. And then, having accomplished the perfect will of the Father, Jesus stands in for mankind in their failure.

On the cross Jesus once again takes the place of God's fallen people. In perfect obedience, Jesus stands in for mankind as the object of God's wrath. The failures of Israel and all people to walk in God's will the way Jesus did are paid for by the Son of God who did it all for us. Jesus completes God's project of salvation perfectly, and in doing so takes all our failed attempts upon Himself, bears their punishment, and then makes them disappear.

And through faith, that is now how things stand with us. The completed project of salvation stands flawless before God. We didn't do it. God did it for us through Christ. Christ has earned forgiveness for us through His suffering and death, so that we can stand in the safety of His salvation. Christ's obedience unto death and His glorious resurrection has accomplished what Israel couldn't; it has made for God a holy people.

When God called Israel, His son, out of Egypt, they failed to be the children God wanted. When Christ His Son was called out of Egypt, He was the perfect child God sought. Through faith in Christ, we join with Christ as that kind of child.

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ," Paul's words from Galatians.

It is just a single sentence in Matthew's narrative. It is so easy to skip right over it and never realize what the apostle is really saying. *"This was to fulfill what the lord had spoken by the prophet, 'out of Egypt I called my son.'"*

God called Jesus out of Egypt because the earlier son, the son that was us, the son that was a people mired in sin, that son was a dismal failure. The Son that did it right was of God and did it all for us. We did nothing. Yet, He stood in for us and now through faith, we stand in Him. We are His workmanship. We are perfection made by His blood. We are the new Israel, the forgiven people who stand pure and holy before God not by our own works, but by the sweat and blood of Christ, God's perfect workman who has crafted us to be His own.