

Matthew 2:13-23 (NRSV)

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, 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." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

So much happening in this scripture, including:

- Like his OT namesake, Joseph is a dreamer. ***How many dreams does Joseph have?***
- After visiting Jesus and his parents, the wise men elude Herod and go home by a different path.
- Herod the Judean king becomes so paranoid about a promised infant king that he kills every infant and toddler in and around the town of Bethlehem.
- Overwhelming public outcry over that state-sanctioned genocide. In Matthew's gospel, danger and death intersect with the Christmas story. The powers that be defy God's purposes.
- Even after Herod's death, Joseph and Mary and Jesus end up settling in Galilee to stay far away from Herod's family.
- Three commands drive the action (angel, Herod, angel)
- Three quotes from Hebrew scripture at the end of each paragraph — supporting Matthew's intention to show Jesus as the saving one promised by God in Israel's history and scripture.

And in the middle of all that, Joseph and Mary grab their child and leave their country in order to save the baby's life.

To discuss with neighbors in your pew:

In your family history, when did someone migrate from one place to another?

What dynamics or forces prompted that move?

Has anyone in your family moved because life was unsafe or untenable?



On today's bulletin cover: *Flight to Egypt*, digital painting by Lauren Wright Pittman; inspired by Matthew 2:13-23 (used by permission of <https://sanctifiedart.com>)

What first draws your attention in this piece of art?

What else do you notice after a little more time looking at it?

What emotions do the figures convey?

Lauren's artist statement:

Our ancestors forge pathways that become a part of who we are. It is difficult to break those patterns, even if you aren't keenly aware of them. In this context, one of the most defining ancestral narratives of an Israelite's life would be the Exodus narrative. Joseph is advised to move in direct opposition to the way his ancestors moved. He must go toward Egypt instead of away. It takes great courage to consider the ingrained patterns of your history and blaze a new trail.

Joseph must uproot his family from their home to ensure their son will become who he was made to be. In this image, the Holy Family escapes the wrath of Herod in Bethlehem and faithfully travels toward the looming unknown in Egypt. They are flanked by flowers: on the left are Star of Bethlehem flowers and on the right are stylized lotus flowers you might see in Egyptian art. In the background are shadowy figures. On the left, they represent Herod's men seeking to kill Jesus, and on the right, they represent the weight of the past — God's enslaved people and their oppressors. The menacing silhouettes surround the family, personifying the inherent risk in either path they choose to take. The angel of God envelopes the Holy Family in an embrace, comforting them from the grief of leaving home and shielding them from the fear of what is to come. In other icons of this pilgrimage, the Nile River often flows below, teeming with fish, but I chose to fill the water with lotus flowers, Egypt's national flower and a symbol of regeneration. God is writing a new story, transforming their destination, which swells with generational trauma and pain, into a haven of refuge and rebirth.

— Lauren Wright Pittman

Egypt saves Israel (Joseph and his family saved from famine) and later *abuses/exploits* Israel (Joseph's descendants as forced labor for Pharaoh).

Now Egypt becomes a haven of safety once more for descendants of Joseph.
In fact *this* Joseph and Mary and Jesus reenact events from Genesis and Exodus.

What does it mean for us that Jesus was a refugee, along with his parents?

Are there any migrations you will need to make this new year, literally or metaphorically?

Where might God be calling you to go in a different direction from your family tradition? From social expectations? From the stories you've been told?

One scholar says,

The combined testimony of revelation in dreams, reenacting OT events, and fulfilling scripture points to God's continued intervention, an intervention that does not erase the danger, risks, and death inherent in life...but reveals God's presence and activity in the darkness. By tracing the parallels between God's actions in Israel's exodus and God's actions with Jesus, Matthew shows that God's dominion will clash with and triumph over Herod's, whose days are numbered.¹

In the name of God the Host,
God the Refugee,
and God the Spirit of Holy Hospitality.

¹ Sweat, Laura C. "Matthew 2:13-15: Theological Perspective." *Feasting on the Gospels — Matthew, Volume 1: Chapters 1-13*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013. p. 24.