

## GOD GOES GREAT DISTANCES TO SAVE

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this second Sunday of the Christmas season,

*And He was there until the end of Herod; that it might have been fulfilled the saying by (the) Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called the Son of Me."<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! For some of those whom God has gathered here this day, that is the first time this calendar year you have heard those greetings in this place. They remind us that this is the 11th day of Christmas, in the Year of our Lord, 2015. To that end, we have sung, and will sing, several Christmas carols/hymns today as this season gets set to transition to another big day in the Church on Tuesday!

Today, before God's Service to you, the bells greeted you with an invitation to receive your King. You, as God's children, responded to their invitation. You did so by singing of God's care for His little ones. That was done to prepare you to hear the proclamation that God goes great distances to save – to save Jesus to die another day – to save you from your sins!

All of those things were placed before us, through our mouths and into our ears to get us to hear how St. Joseph responded to God's guiding in his dreams. We have heard that the man called by God to fulfill the fourth commandment's role on earth for God's Son continued his God-ordained journeys. Our Christmas text records Joseph's response to the angelic message:

*And he, rising, he took along the Child and the mother of Him, by night and they went away into Egypt...<sup>2</sup>*

Joseph, a God-declared righteous man, steeped in the Word of the Lord, heard God's message and responded. Four years ago this Sunday, the sermon spoke a lot

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:15.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 2:14.

about God's use of "Joseph, the Dreamer." Since that is still fresh in many of our minds, there is no need to go into that again! There is so much in this day's text, that a literal month of Sundays would not have enough hours to preach it all!

In addition, many of us have already heard of another event mentioned in St. Matthew's biblical/historical record. That is of the Slaughter of the Innocents, which is the appointed minor festival Gospel for December 28<sup>th</sup> each year. Vicar successfully resisted the temptation to give priority of place to that text over the Gospel reading for last Sunday. (He had some encouragement to that end, and today is one reason why).

So, we are not delving into the martyrdom of the little boys much today. Nor are we focusing on God's working through His Word in the means of human dreams in any depth. Rather, the Holy Spirit is leading us, through God's Word this year back to this theme: God goes great distances to save – to save Jesus to die another day – to save you from your sins!

That is partly because of the way this day's readings fall into the calendar this year. You may recall that we do not always get a Second Sunday of Christmas each year. When we do, it often falls unaligned with the two great Feasts – Nativity and Epiphany. That is not because the Church Fathers centuries ago were confused about the order of events after Jesus' birth. Rather, it has to do with how the secular calendars move about due to new moons and such.

As a result, trying to keep the daily readings of the Christmas season in some kind of reasonable order is often a "fail." For example, today we are hearing of the "Flight into Egypt." You will recall that Joseph's dreams came after the visit of the Magi – which as a matter of fact, is the set piece for the proclamation of each January 6. (That is Epiphany for us, and Christmas for our somewhat separated brethren in the Orthodox Churches).

Ah, but then, I am preaching as one who actually attends or has direct involvement in every Lord's service to His people. We, when we consider how the

readings of this time of year jump about, must keep in mind that the majority of us do not hear all of the readings for this festival season. Some are ill – this is the cold and flu season as all the advertisements remind us. Others have work. Some do not drive at night or in the rain/snow. Others just are lazy in their reception of God’s gifts – allowing desires for entertainment or recreation to get in the way of hearing the Word. (I dare say there are a relative few number of souls who hear the Word who only annually hear about the birth – Christmas and resurrection –Easter, of our Lord. We can say, at least they hear of those).

In any event, those two are not separated anyhow in the preaching and teaching. That is why today’s theme states this: God goes great distances to save – to save Jesus to die another day – to save you from your sins! To that end, back to our text...

*And he, rising, he took along the Child and the mother of Him, by night and they went away into Egypt, and He was there until the end of Herod; that it might have been fulfilled the saying by (the) Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called the Son of Me.”<sup>3</sup>*

Think of the distances God went to in order to put all of that into place. First, He, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, descended from the heights of heaven to be conceived and born as the perfect Man. Second, He Who gave the Law, the only One Who is above the Law, placed Himself under the Law – as Vicar so aptly proclaimed this past Thursday. (Hear what you miss when you are absent from the Lord’s services to you! Repent, and resolve in Him to be more attentive to receiving His gifts this New Year. Know that He came to die to forgive you such sins, and He was preserved from death many times until the right time that He could do so).

The God Who became flesh with us, traveled, as a truly innocent infant, maybe two years old (you have little idea of how long Jean searches to find an appropriate bulletin cover for these Christmas festival days – so many have Jesus still in the manger at the visit of the Magi and so forth). The God Who not only humbled

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 2:14-15.

Himself to be born of the Virgin, also went so far as to place Himself in the charge of a human male, to be watched over by a human step-father. He Who created all humans became submissive to His creatures.

What a God! Then, in the arms of His mother, equipped with the gifts of the Magi (Wise Men – more of them on Tuesday), under the guidance of Joseph, God allowed Himself to be carried off – to Egypt. Just to get to the border outpost, Pelusium, the ancient land gateway to Egypt from the Promised Land, the Holy Family needed to travel about the same distance as you would to go from here to Douglas, Arizona. (Think of that with no paved roads, traveling 10-12 miles a day). Then, once in Egypt, the God of Egypt – for Jesus is God of all nations whether they follow Him or not – He would have had to take up lodging wherever Joseph secured it for Him.

There they would have remained until those who were seeking the Child's life were dead. If that waiting period were only during the time of Herod the Great and his courtiers, that would have been until the year 4 BC. (Remember, by our calendars, Jesus was born sometime between 6 and 4 BC). Apparently, that stay included part of the time of the rule Herod's successor, his son Archelaus. He was an even more insecure and brutal ruler than Herod the Great. Jesus, Joseph and Mary could have remained in Egypt until AD 6 (the year Archelaus' was deposed by the Roman Emperor on account of his excesses). That could be up to 10 years of exile for the Holy Family. That would explain a lot about the missing history of Jesus' early life from the biblical records). In any event, whether one year or 10 had passed, Joseph, again following the Word of God, returned his family to the Promised Land, as our text declares:

*Then he, rising, took with (him) the Child and the Mother of Him, and went in into (the) land of Israel. But, hearing that Archelaus (was) King of Judea instead of his father Herod, he feared there to go. And being warned by God in (a) dream, he went into the parts of Galilee.<sup>4</sup>*

Distance: Catalina to Winslow, through mountains, on unpaved roads.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 2:21-22

*And going, they dwelt in (a) city being called Nazareth; thus (it) was fulfilled, the saying through the prophets: "(A) Nazarene He will be called."<sup>5</sup>*

God goes great distances to save – to save Jesus to die another day – to save you from your sins!

Nazareth to Jerusalem; Jerusalem to Cross; Cross to grave; grave to 40 days; Earth to heaven; heaven to font to you!

God goes great distances to save – to save Jesus to die another day – to save you from your sins! Those divine realities make for a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

The Second Sunday After Christmas (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 77:11-20; Genesis 46:1-7; I Peter 4:12-19; Matthew 2:13-23

January 4, 2015

*Pastor Michael H. Merhouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>5</sup> *Matthew 2:23.*