

Sermon for Christmas 2C
Sunday, January 2, 2022
“God went through it too”

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Merry Christmas. It's still Christmastide, and we're still in the twelve days of Christmas, which will culminate this Thursday on the Feast of the Epiphany, the day when the Church celebrates the arrival of the three kings or Magi to pay homage to Jesus. The Second Sunday after Christmas Day focuses on the Holy Family and their flight into Egypt and has an important message to tell. That message begins with the collect of the day, which reminds us that not only did God do a marvelous thing in creating us, but he also restored our sinful brokenness by humbling himself in his divinity to share in our humanity. The message of Christmas is that God became man and pitched his tent in this broken world of ours in order to restore us to wholeness and bring us closer to himself. The mass began with that message and will end with that same message in the reading of the Last Gospel, which comes from the Gospel according to John, Chapter 1, verses 1-14. It's not noted in the bulletin, and I wanted to give you a heads up, so you won't be thrown of at the end of mass today. Maybe it's divine providence that I forgot to put the Last Gospel in the bulletin; this way you'll be forced to listen to the words.

But between the two declarations of the Incarnation is a story of an event in the life of the Holy Family, in the life of the infant Word of God-incarnate: that is, the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. What precedes today's reading is the story where the three Magi went to King Herod to ask where the child was, who was born king of the Jews. That bit of information scared Herod and caused him to believe that such a child was a threat to his power. He asked the wise men to let him know where the child was so he could “pay homage.” Of course, we know what Herod really intended to do; his order to kill all of the children under age two is told in the verses that today's reading skipped; that event was recognized this past Tuesday on the Feast of the Holy Innocents. But, Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt, and the infant Jesus did not fall victim to the killing of the Holy Innocents. And when it was time to return, an angel appeared again to Joseph and told him to take the family back to the land of Israel, but not back to Bethlehem in Judea, because Herod's son Archelaus was ruling there, but to Galilee in the north, to the town of Nazareth, where Jesus would grow up. We are told that all this was to fulfill prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures that the Messiah would be a nazorean.

Now there are some important things I would like to highlight about the story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. First of all, why Egypt? Well, at that time, Judea and Egypt were part of the Roman Empire and there were ancient coastal trade routes between the two regions, one was known as the *Via Maris*. Egypt was easy to travel to.

Church tradition presumes that this event occurred when Jesus was about two years old, because of Herod's decree to massacre all male children aged two and younger; we believe that it took the Magi that long to arrive in Bethlehem. Also, in fleeing their country, the Holy Family became refugees. Just imagine: Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus fleeing their homeland because of the political situation there. Because of a dream that Joseph had, they went to Egypt to seek asylum in the same country to which, over a thousand years earlier, Jacob and his sons fled because of famine. That must have been a very sudden and unexpected disruption in the Holy Family's life; the quiet life that this family thought they were going to enjoy was suddenly interrupted by a dangerous situation, and they had to become refugees in another land for safety. This very event has something to say to us.

If God's own son—God's human manifestation of God's own self—went through all of this, why do you think you won't have troubles in your life? That is the critical question to ponder when we ponder the Christmas story. God's Incarnation was meant to teach us how to live in the real world and how to recognize God continuously in our midst. Jesus's birth didn't suddenly rid the world of evil, vice, disaster, or tragedy. It didn't suddenly make people less greedy, less power hungry, less tyrannical, less unethical. Jesus's coming into the world as God's Word-Incarnate did not end poverty, hunger, violence, or human vice. Jesus's miraculous birth did not end earthly death for us mortals or for Jesus himself. No, none of those things was part of God's purpose here on earth; rather, he came to show us how we could be the image of God in the midst of earthly realities. He did it by living through the worst of circumstances.

So, when we want to get all bent out of shape at the current state of the world, when we want to lament when circumstances—like COVID—continue to interrupt our lives and disrupt our plans, when we want to feel sorry for ourselves for where life may have taken us, we must not forget that God went through it too, in Jesus. Jesus lived through horrible disaster and horrendous political atrocity. Jesus would later go through rejection, doubt, disbelief, persecution, and prosecution. So when we feel like God has completely abandoned us, Jesus's birth reminds us that God is always with us—*Imma-nu El*. God humbled himself in his divinity to share with us in our humanity—every aspect, every joy and sorrow, every feeling. God-incarnate went through it too, in Jesus the Christ.

Knowing and believing that, we should always be that glimmer of hope to ourselves and to others. We've got to hold on to the joy and reassurance that God is always with us, not watching from some far-away vantage point in the universe while life beats us up, but right here in the mud of human existence with us. God rejoices with us in our joys that we experience in life and he weeps with us in our sorrows. We can be the voice of hope for those in despair—that it can and will get better, because Jesus showed us it can be done. Jesus knew what it meant to be scared when he was

born in a place governed by a tyrannical, oppressive empire. Jesus knew what it meant to be an immigrant and a refugee when he and his family had to flee to Egypt. Jesus knew what it meant to live humbly because he was born to a humble family. So, if we need to know what we can do to live from day to day, we need only look to Jesus and what he went through and to learn from his life.

As we wrap up the Christmas season, let us keep in mind the wonderful gift we have been given in the Incarnation, in the birth of Jesus Christ, who humbled himself in his divinity to share in our humanity: to show us the way to a beautiful life here on earth and eternal life to come. Amen.

Resource

<https://www.thecompassnews.org/2021/02/how-the-holy-family-got-to-egypt/>