

Second Sunday after Christmas
St. Matthew 2:13-23

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It's a story familiar to one who has spent a childhood in Sunday School.

A young man has older brothers who are not too fond of him. In particular, they are envious of him because he happens to be his father's favorite son. He had dreams in which he sees representations of his family bowing down to representations of him. That didn't help ease the tension between his brothers and him. His father had given him a special coat, too—more to be envious of.

One day, his brothers plot to get rid of him. They wanted to kill him and bring his coat back to their father and tell them an animal had killed him. One of them, however, convinced the rest not to kill him. He was sold into slavery, his coat covered with animal blood, and the lie told to their father.

The traders to whom he was sold eventually brought him into Egypt. There, he worked his way up from prisoner to Pharaoh's right-hand-man—a Pharaoh in his own right. You see, he had been given the ability to interpret dreams, one of which foretold years of plenty followed by years of famine. He advised the Pharaoh to store up resources during those years of plenty so that they would have more than enough come those years of famine. And the time of famine came upon them all.

That included his family outside of Egypt. Hearing of the great reserves down in Egypt, the father sends a delegation of his sons to buy some of the store in order that they may eat and live. When they arrived in Egypt, the young man recognized his brothers, but did not reveal himself. This played out another time, only then, the young man did reveal himself to his brothers.

Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." [He] said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:18-21)

Eventually, the entire family ended up in Egypt, and they lived there for many generations. Many people were saved alive.

The family's numbers grew—they were as numerous as a nation. They even outnumbered the Egyptians. By this time, they had become slaves to the Egyptians, but their enslavement wouldn't last long—only, say, about 400 years in total—and they were led out of the land of bondage, the land of the Egyptians, and into the land of the Canaanites, the land that God had sworn on oath to them. There, they settled and dwelt.

Some 700 years later, there arose a prophet in Israel by the name of Hosea. Through this prophet, God anguishes over the people's unceasing iniquity and willful disobedience. He tells the people again and again about the graciousness of God, warning them to repent of their sin, and reminding them of how He led the people out of slavery in Egypt and into salvation in the Promised Land. "Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." (Hosea 6:1)

Then, near the end of his ministry, Hosea says and writes something so that the people look to the past to see a future event, predicting a second exodus, as it were: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son." (Hosea 11:1)

O Israel, return to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity; Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to

Him, "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us, We will not ride on horses, Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods.' For in You the fatherless finds mercy." I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him. (Hosea 14:1-4)

Remember, O people, you were once slaves, but God has called you out of the land of slavery. Now, hear, O people, you find yourselves in slavery once again, but return to the Lord, and He will call you out of slavery.

Oh, but the people so often respond, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone." (John 8:33) You see it in Herod's rage in today's text. He is a slave to his own ego and position, having been placed upon the throne in Jerusalem, a sort of puppet ruler—He seeks to keep the throne and crown. You see it in your own lives, dear hearers, in bondage to your own lusts and desires, your own egos and positions, your own goods and possessions—you are in bondage to your sin, and cannot free yourselves. Welcome to Egypt, dear hearers.

Of course, sin never recognizes itself as evil. Herod was only doing what he thought he was his right to do as ruler in Jerusalem over the land of Judah. In his mind, there was absolutely nothing wrong with having the boys in Bethlehem slaughtered; he was completely justified in making Rachel weep. All the while, the Son of God escapes to Egypt, like Jacob before Him.

The same goes for you. You naturally see nothing wrong with the sins that you commit. Your bound will claim that you are well within your rights to do what it is you do—that there is nothing evil about it. And so, you continue in your evil ways feeling completely justified in doing whatever it is you do that is contrary to God's will. Apart from a special action of God, you know no differently.

That special action is, first, the incarnation of the Son of God. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Earth receives her king, and that He is conceived and born in the fullness of time (cf. Galatians 4:4-5)—at just the right time, at His particular moment in time—has implications for the past, present, and future. God becomes united to His creation, as He takes on the flesh of His creation and receives the name Jesus—Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

First, however, Jesus escapes Herod by fleeing to Egypt. It may be hard to comprehend, but He is saving His people from their sins, even in His escape to Egypt. Jesus doesn't go there to end up in slavery, but He receives a taste of what it was for His people to be in slavery. Herod dies, and Jesus goes through his own exodus, fulfilling the words of the prophet Hosea: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." The infant King of kings settles in a despised part of the world, Nazareth, where He would grow. As an adult, Jesus makes His way into the wilderness and is baptized by John in the Jordan. He then begins a three-year journey to Jerusalem to assume His throne, though not the one Herod sought to protect from Him decades before.

Along the way, Jesus tells the people of the freedom from bondage that He is come to effect. He heals, restores sight and hearing, raises the dead, and forgives sins. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) "O Israel, return to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity..."

Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is nailed to the cross and dies in bitter agony. For upon the cross, Jesus receives the just reward for the sins of the world, though He Himself is sinless—for the sins of the world, there's the implications for past, present, and future. His death is the ransom from the slavery to sin for Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers, for Pharaoh and Herod, for the Egyptians, Romans, and Jews, for Rachel and the slaughtered boys, for those who have gone before you, for you, and for those who are to come after you.

Now, here you are, dear Baptized, covered in His blood. Jesus has rescued you, brought you out of Egypt as He Himself was called out from that land. You have received the sign of the cross upon forehead and breast, marking you as one redeemed by Jesus Christ the crucified. Into His incarnation, birth, life, death, and resurrection you are baptized, and having been baptized, you have put on Christ—you are a new creation. In short, you have been called out of Egypt and made a son of God in the likeness of the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. In Him you live and move and have your being, for this life and into the life to come.

So we back come to this: “Out of Egypt I called My Son,” God says. He speaks of Israel. He speaks of Jesus. He speaks of you, dear Baptized. Through Baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit, you recognize the bondage you have been in since birth, but you have in Jesus Christ the One who brings you out of that land of bondage—who has brought you out of that land of bondage. Sure, you still struggle with your Old Adam who calls evil good and good evil, but you have been clothed with Christ the crucified, donning the robe of righteousness which is yours purely by God’s grace. By the work of Jesus, the Son of God, when the Father in heaven sees you, He sees His son, not His only-begotten son, but a son “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:13)

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” He is come to you, and by God-given faith you have received Him. Jesus is your Lord and your Salvation. You have been called out of Egypt, that is to say, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.