

**MATTHEW 2:1-15**  
**DRAMATIC EVENTS IN AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACE:**  
**FLEEING TO EGYPT**

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.’ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

“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.’”<sup>1</sup>

**C**hrist’s presence always brings disruption and disorder. Jesus warned disciples, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” [MATTHEW 10:34]. Even His birth was the cause of deep sorrow for many and unmitigated rage for others. It all began with the arrival of wise men in Jerusalem.

Though the birth of Messiah was prophesied long ages before He came, no kings or princes came to greet Him at His birth. Though shepherds had bruted about the account of angels announcing His birth and how they had seen the child just as the angel had said, no priest, no scribe, no religious devotee had come to witness what God had done. Undoubtedly, these shepherds had spoken of what they saw and heard even to those who received the sheep they had tended on that dark night. The sheep had been destined for sacrifice in the Temple, and when they were delivered, the shepherds must surely have spoken of the message the angel announced and of the child they had seen.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

It was nine kilometres from Jerusalem to the village of Bethlehem, about the distance from Dawson Creek to Pouce Coupe. To people accustomed to walking, it was not a great distance. Yet, no visitors from Jerusalem came to the village. It was perhaps as much as two years after the child was born that strangers came into the city looking for one who was born “king of the Jews.” And their presence precipitated widespread disruption of daily lives and deep pain for multiples families.

Wise men, perhaps astrologers or members of some other class of mystic sages from Persia, had trekked over vast distances through hostile deserts. This entourage made the long, arduous journey in order to worship a newborn king in Jerusalem, the Judean capital. The unexpected arrival of the caravan undoubtedly created a stir in the Judean capital; and if their arrival created a sensation, the purpose of their coming would explode like an errant bomb in the mind of the ruler of Judea and his court.

These men had witnessed an omen in the heavens—a hitherto unknown star that shone brightly, seemingly guiding them toward a small kingdom on the fringes of the Empire. In some manner, they concluded that this omen heralded the birth of a king—a king they determined they would find and worship. Who could have guessed that their presence in the city would cause a wicked ruler to feel threatened by a baby? Who could have known that their arrival would compel the holy family to hurriedly leave their home in order to flee in terror to Egypt?

Isn't it strange how the revelation of a blessing can bring such sorrow to those who were blessed? Isn't it strange how so very often we cannot imagine how God can work in the midst of chaos and grief? And yet, God is at work even when we can't see Him. We who are followers of the Lamb of God discover, and then we rediscover, that we walk by faith and not by sight. If we could see where God was leading, and if we knew precisely how we fit into God's plan, we would not be walking by faith. Something like that was happening with Joseph.

**JOSEPH** — Matthew's Nativity account focuses on Joseph and his part in the birth of the Christ. We are given no details about the birth of the Christ in Matthew's account. Rather, we are told how Joseph was disoriented until confronted in a dream by an angel of God who commanded him to take Mary as his wife. As we saw in an earlier message, Joseph was obedient to the divine command. The holy text pointedly comments, “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called His Name Jesus” [**MATTHEW 1:24, 25**].

Then, without providing the abundance of detail given by Doctor Luke, Matthew notes, “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem” [**MATTHEW 2:1**]. The actual birth of the Son of God is essentially ignored in order to focus on what happened after He was born. There is no angelic interaction with a young teenage girl, no angelic chorus heralding the birth of the Son of God, no shepherds leaving their flocks in order to worship the child—there is just a statement informing readers that what is about to be related took place some time later.

Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the king, according to the text. Which Herod? “Herod” was a family name.<sup>2</sup> This family ruled Palestine immediately before and during the first half of the first Christian century. Among the Herods mentioned in the Bible are Agrippa I, who ordered James the son of Zebedee killed and who imprisoned Peter [see **ACTS 12:1-23**], and his son, Agrippa II, the Herod who heard Paul's defence [see **ACTS 25:13-27; ACTS 26:32**].

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<sup>2</sup> Information about the Herods taken from Robert Stagg, “Herod,” (ed.) Chad Brand et al., **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003), 754–755

Since we are naming members of the Herod family, we must name Drusilla, the third and youngest daughter of Agrippa I. She had been married briefly at age fourteen to Azizus, king of Emessa. About a year later, she was married to Felix, the Roman procurator [see **ACTS 24:24**]. Drusilla had a sister named Bernice. Bernice married her own brother, Agrippa II. She was present with her brother/husband when Paul appeared before them in **ACTS 25**.

Herod Philip was son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. Luke identifies him as Tetrarch of Galilee [**LUKE 3:1**]. Herod Philip was married to Salome, the daughter of Herodias—all names with which you are familiar from the Gospels. He is noted for having built Caesarea Philippi. There is also a Herod Philip mentioned in **MARK 6:17** as the first husband of Herodias. Most scholars do not believe he is the same Herod who was Tetrarch of Galilee.

Let me mention two more members of the Herod family. Herodias [see **MATTHEW 14:3**] was the daughter of Aristobulus (the son of Herod and Mariamne I) and Bernice, the daughter of Herod's sister, Salome. Herodias was the second wife of Herod Antipas. It was Herodias who called for the head of John the Baptist [**MATTHEW 14:3-12; MARK 6:17-29; LUKE 3:19, 20**].

Salome was the daughter of Herodias. Salome was married to Philip. After the death of Philip, Salome married a relative, Aristobulus, prince of Chalcis by whom she had three children [**MATTHEW 14:6-22; MARK 6:22-29**].

However, none of these members of the Herod family could be the Herod named in Matthew's narrative of events following the birth of Jesus. In order to fully understand events in the text, I believe it will be helpful to identify this Herod who is named in our text. This Herod is known to history as Herod the Great, who reigned from 37 to 4 B.C. This Herod proved to be one of the cruellest rulers of all history. Whether justified or not, he did not hesitate to murder members of his own family when he believed them to be a threat to his continued rule. He was, however, an effective administrator who made Palestine what it was in the first Christian century. Thus, he has gone down in history as "the Great." However, the epithet is valid for him only in comparison to his accomplishments in comparison to other members of his family.

The territories under Herod's rule prospered economically and culturally. Herod erected many important buildings, including the Temple. He then protected the Temple from desecration by his soldiers in order to keep the Jews on side. Thus, at one and the same time, the Jews loathed him and flattered him. Herod kept them off balance through skillful manipulation of their sentiments.

Herod the Great was a ruthless fighter, a cunning negotiator and a subtle diplomat. The Romans were content to keep him in power because he subdued opposition to Roman rule and maintained order among the Jews. This, and his intense loyalty to the emperor, ensured that he was seen as an ally of Rome. Thus, Herod the Great was appointed as king of Judea, where he was in control of the Jewish people. The Jews distrusted him because he was an outsider—he was an Idumean. Therefore, he established his authority through building multiple forts and staffing them with foreign soldiers, making Judea an occupied territory.

Herod is noted for ruthlessly slaughtering his male children and even killing his wife, Mariamne. Herod justified these murders because of his need to ensure that no legal claimant to his throne remained. Having killed Mariamne, Herod's two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, learned that Herod was responsible for her death. As you might imagine, they were less than thrilled when they learned that their father murdered their mother. Thus, Herod felt compelled to have them killed in 7 B.C. When this despicable incident came to light, a saying became popular, "It is better to be Herod's pig (*hys*) than to be his son (*huios*)."

Near the end of Herod's life, an intense struggle emerged within his family for succession to the throne which he had occupied so long. His ten marriages and the fifteen children he had sired, to say nothing of his own depraved character, guaranteed there would be such a struggle for dominance. One son, Antipater, so poisoned his father's mind against two other eligible sons, Archelaus and Philip, that Herod chose his youngest son, Antipas, to be his sole successor. Later, he changed his will and made Archelaus king. Antipas and Philip received positions as tetrarchs over smaller territories.<sup>3</sup> This is the man who reigned when Jesus was born!

In light of Herod's willingness to kill his own sons, it is easy to believe that he could issue an order to slaughter children two years of age and under in one Judean town in order to protect his continued reign. Twenty or so infants in a small Judean town would mean little in Rome, though it would be disruptive of continuing good relations with many of the Jews. What is puzzling is why he would depend upon foreigners who appeared unannounced in Jerusalem to disclose who this new king was. How long did it take before Herod realised that he had been duped?

When an angel of the Lord warned Joseph in a dream to take the child and flee to Egypt, there appears to have been no delay; the text implies that it was that very night. How Joseph provided for his family in Egypt, we are not told. What is important is that God had prophesied that the Christ would come out of Egypt. Since He was to be born in Bethlehem, it was impossible to see how He would come from Egypt. In all this, God worked to fulfil prophecy.

**THE HARBINGER** — “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

The star of Christmas is ubiquitous in contemporary culture during the Christmas season. Most people likely never give a second thought as to why the star is associated with Christmas. The star is an ornament that is placed atop the Christmas tree, if an angel isn't there instead. Perhaps stars are displayed on lampposts or affixed to the doors of our homes. Regardless, a star is found almost everywhere during the Christmas season. Why is this?

The star was God's way of announcing the birth of His Son. Yes, He sent angels to a select few shepherds; but the star of Bethlehem appeared in the skies over Bethlehem. These sages studied the night skies, watching each evening as the stars and the planets appeared to rise in the east. One night, they noted a new star. It hadn't been there in the past, but there it was. We have no way of knowing how long they observed this new phenomenon, but it was long enough to discuss among themselves what they saw and to attempt to decipher what this could mean.

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., **Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 1995)

Something about the appearance of this star seemed to beckon them, drawing them to leave their ziggurats. Consulting ancient texts, they concluded that the star must herald the birth of a king. But what king? Moreover, that star remained in the sky long enough to attract the attention of the wise men in a distant land and then to guide them on their long, arduous journey. We are not told how long this star remained in the night skies, but the time must have been at least two years; and if it marked the conception of the Christ, the star may have been visible for as long as three years.

Why would I suggest such an extended appearance of this star? When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, they were summoned to appear before the king. Nothing escapes the notice of the king, especially when the king is as insecure as Herod the Great was. This brutal, ruthless Idumean received intelligence that these strangers recently arrived in Jerusalem were inquiring where the King of the Jews had been born. You may be certain that such inquiries were disturbing to the king. The third verse of our text is suggestive, if nothing else. That verse reads, “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” [MATTHEW 2:3].

If the king was “disturbed,” you may be certain that the entire city was going to be disturbed. He was not about to be disturbed alone. Remember, this is a king who didn’t hesitate to kill his own children if he thought they had designs on his throne. He was prepared to kill his wife if he thought she favoured one of her children to sit on this throne. The word Matthew employs when he says the king was troubled, speaks of causing “great mental distress,” or “to cause acute emotional distress.”<sup>4</sup> One thing was certain about Herod, he wasn’t going to allow himself to be distressed for long; Herod the Great didn’t get headaches—he gave headaches.

One reason the king was disturbed is hidden in the original language Matthew employs. The wise men asked, “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews” [MATTHEW 2:2]? The construction of the question implies that they are asking where the Jewish king is to be found. Now, while Herod was king over Judea, remember that he was not Jewish. He was Idumean. Idumea was ancient Edom.

The name Edom had been changed to Idumea after the conquest of the area by Alexander the Great. The name encompassed both the former land of Edom and southern Judah that had been occupied by the descendants of Esau after the Jews were deported during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Herod wasn’t Jewish—he was a descendant of Esau. Hearing these strangers asking where they could find the Jewish king must have not only irked Herod, it must have galled his soul, reminding him that he was at best a pretender seated upon David’s throne.

Remember that I said that Herod was a cunning negotiator and a subtle diplomat. This king knew how to get things done, and few were prepared to complain when he got things done. He put his negotiator hat on to find out what was going on. Herod wasn’t about to show his hand until everything was ready. He needed to ensure that his intel was up to date. A new king? Since no one had been born in his palace, it must be that someone was about to lay claim to the Throne of David; that could only mean that someone was being readied to make the claim that he was the Messiah.

Send for the chief priest! Send for the scribes! Ensure that those who were conversant in the Law and the Prophets were assembled immediately—and he did mean immediately. When this king demanded that you appear for an audience, you appeared. “Everyone here? Good! Now, gentlemen, tell me one thing, and be quick about it: where is the Christ to be born?”

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996), 314

There was no need to consult among themselves—the answer to this question was obvious to anyone who bore the name of priest, or scribe. This was something they learned in Prophecy 101. Immediately, the chief priest responded, and the scribes no doubt nodded in agreement: “In Bethlehem of Judea.” Not only would they tell the king where the Messiah was to be born, they would tell him why they were so confident that this was the place of his birth. Citing the Prophet Micah, the assembled religious sages intoned,

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

[MATTHEW 2:5, 6]

The priest and the scribes had surely satisfied the curiosity of the king; having obtained the information he needed, he appears to have dismissed them. However, he then summoned the strangers, who were still lingering about the palace. He called them to a private audience and asked them how long they had been observing this star. If he could ascertain this bit of information that heretofore had been neglected, he would have greater certainty when he at last found the pretender to his throne. From subsequent events related in Matthew’s Gospel, it would appear that the wise men must have agreed that they had first seen the star at least a year earlier.

At this point, I am going to destroy another Christmas myth. Whenever a church or a family build a crèche, they include everything they can—shepherds, angels, stars, oxen, donkeys, sheep and wise men with their camels and their gifts. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but the birth was perhaps eighteen months earlier.

Jesus the Messiah was born in a sheep cote, likely a cave where sheep were penned whenever the shepherds brought their charges to town; but it is highly unlikely that once the census was completed that Joseph and his little family would have continued to make a home in the sheep pen. After all, the shepherds would be bringing their sheep back to Bethlehem at some point in order to send them to the Temple for the various prescribed sacrifices. Joseph and his family would need to vacate at some point after the birth.

It is unlikely that Joseph would immediately return to Nazareth. I can easily imagine that the family would find housing in Bethlehem once the census has been completed. It was the census, after all, that had brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Mary would need some time to recuperate after delivering her firstborn child. Bethlehem was only a short distance southwest of Jerusalem, so it would be convenient to care for all the rituals that were required of the firstborn child. Perhaps that would be one good reason to remain in the area. Also, both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David, and Bethlehem was the ancestral home of David’s line. Whereas Bethlehem was less than nine kilometers from Jerusalem, Nazareth was somewhat farther away; it was slightly more than one hundred kilometres northeast of the city.

Joseph and Mary had not left Nazareth under the most propitious conditions. Mary was pregnant and they hadn’t even married when the census was announced. It was not required that she travel with her husband during her pregnancy. However, the fact that Mary accompanied Joseph indicates that he was unwilling to leave her home where prying eyes would see her condition and cruel comments would wound her soul. This being so, there was likely no hurry in returning home. Joseph was a carpenter. If he could make a living in Nazareth, he could make a living in Bethlehem. No need to hurry back to the little town that would only bring sorrow.

That concern about cruel comments that people might fling about so casually becomes apparent when we witness one interaction many years later as Jesus interacts with the Jewish leaders. Jesus had called the leaders to discipleship, saying, “I you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” These leaders haughtily rejected his gracious invitation, saying, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

The Jewish leaders bristled at this statement. They growled, “Abraham is our father.”

Again, Jesus gently pushed them to see the incongruity of how they were reacting to Him. He said, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.”

Listen to the cruel response they flung at Jesus, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God” [JOHN 8:31-41]. You can see the sardonic grin on each face as they practically scream at him, “We’re not illegitimate—like you!” We can only imagine what thoughtless taunts Joseph and Mary would have endured had they immediately returned to Nazareth. It must have been difficult enough after they returned from Egypt.

Besides the aforementioned reasons to remain in Bethlehem for at least an extended period following the birth of the Christ, Mary likely would wish to stay where they were until the child was weaned. A child was normally weaned after three years in that far-away day.

Thus, when the wise men at last found the little family, almost two years had passed since the birth of the child. The family was no longer residing in a sheepcote. There was no infant in a manger by that point. There were no oxen, no donkeys, no sheep or even playful puppies standing around the manger and staring at an infant. The wise men found a toddler racing through the home, laughing and playing as toddlers do.

Herod had asked when the star appeared, and the wise men had answered in their innocence. Now, the evil king knew where the child was to be born and when the child had been born. He would need to set in motion his wicked plan to rid himself of yet another threat to his rule. Whatever else may have been true of Herod, he was addicted to power and the trappings of the throne; he would not tolerate anything or anyone who threatened his perch atop the pyramid of power that he had so carefully crafted. So, he kindly requested of the wise men, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him” [MATTHEW 2:8]. We know, however, from subsequent events that he had no intention of worshipping anyone—especially someone who is called “King of the Jews.” His intention was to rid himself of this threat to his continued rule.

**THE WARNING** — “Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, [the wise men] departed to their own country by another way.

“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.’”

At least one angel was kept very busy after the wise men found the Holy Family. These wise men had heard Herod's request and then set out on the short journey to Bethlehem. Apparently, the entourage left in the late afternoon or even at twilight. I say this because the text informs us, "Behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was" [MATTHEW 2:9]. This was the sign they had followed. It should be no surprise, then, that "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" at seeing the star [MATTHEW 2:10]. This was the celestial messenger that had impelled them to undertake the arduous journey. Now, it must have seemed that they were nearing the completion of what must surely have been an exhausting trek.

They found the house. How the star denoted in which house they would find the child they sought, we are not told. Nevertheless, they found the house, announced their presence and requested admission. We can only guess at the surprise Joseph and Mary must have expressed when the wise men arrived. I surmise that they had lived in relative obscurity for the past couple of years. Neighbours likely didn't recognise who they were, despite the shepherds bruited about that they had witnessed something extraordinary. There is nothing to indicate that the family was exceptional in their interaction with others.

They were invited in where they met the child. The text simply says, "Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshipped Him" [MATTHEW 2:11]. They bowed, perhaps they even threw themselves down on the floor, in an act of homage; they worshipped. How startling their actions must have been to Joseph and Mary! There is no indication that the neighbours had worshipped. His brothers and sisters in later days would treat Jesus as rather ordinary, goading Him and taunting Him. But, then, that is how we almost always act with the familiar. There is a grave danger in becoming familiar with the Holy One. It has always disturbed me when people talk about "the man upstairs" or treat the Living God as a common acquaintance. He is God, worthy of our devotion, worthy of our honour.

It is perhaps worth noting that Matthew quite specifically says they "worshipped Him." These men who had traversed deserts and crossed mountains did not worship Mary; they worshipped the child born of Mary. We honour Mary as the mother of our Saviour; but we know that she was sinful, just as we are sinful. Mary needed a Saviour, just as we need a Saviour.

We've become used to Joseph being central to the narrative to this point. It is somewhat jarring to read, "They saw the child with Mary His mother" [MATTHEW 2:11]. Mary has been almost incidental to Matthew's account to this point. It is almost as though a snippet from Luke's Gospel was inserted at this point. Nevertheless, the account soon enough turns to Joseph again. For the moment, we see a decidedly human action as the child shyly runs to His mother when strangers enter the house. Though the child perhaps smiled and warmed to the guests, at the first He would seek out the familiar, He would run to His mother. Mary knew who He was, but it is doubtful that she could fully appreciate all that it meant for this child to be the Son of God. It is difficult for us to fully understand what it means that He is the Son of God.

These strangers brought gifts for the child. Opening their treasure chests, they presented Him with expensive gifts fitting for a king. How incongruous the situation must have seemed—Jesus and his mother and father in a humble home while these strangers worshipped Him and presented expensive gifts worthy of an earthly king. They offered gold, frankincense and myrrh. These would have been among the costliest gifts visitors from the Arabian Peninsula could have offered. I make no particular notation of symbolic nature in the gifts—they represent some of the rarest gifts found in that region. These men came to worship, bringing the best gifts they could offer.



Then, as they slept during the night, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Did all the wise men dream the same dream? Did only the most perceptive receive the warning and then warn the others? Was each of these scholars equally perspicacious, equally sensitive to spiritual matters? Our interest is piqued, but God does not indulge our curiosity; we are left with the simple statement indicating that they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Thus, “they departed to their own country by another way” [MATTHEW 2:12].

It probably took a couple of days for Herod to realise that he had been tricked. When he realised the wise men were not coming back to Jerusalem, he was “furious.” How angry was Herod? The word Matthew chose is the word *thumóō*. This Greek term comes from a root word that seems to have originally meant “to smoke.” Herod was “smoking hot”; and when a king such as Herod burns with anger, it would not do to get in his way.

**THE FLIGHT** — “[Joseph] 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.’”

An angel of the Lord, perhaps the same angel that had earlier persuaded Joseph to take Mary as his wife, appeared to Joseph in a dream, warning him, “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” [MATTHEW 2:13]. Ever obedient to the commands of the Lord, Joseph “rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod” [MATTHEW 2:14, 15a]. They didn’t even wait until morning. He shook Mary, “Wake up! Get dressed! We’re leaving for Egypt tonight!” They dressed, threw a minimum of necessary clothing items into a bag, loaded the donkey and left! There was no time for discussion, no time to debate, there was time only to act. Urgency is written across these verses.

After thorough study, I suppose it is possible that I could derive numerous conclusions that would sound profound, and perhaps that would even be marginally beneficial. However, three thoughts stand out as I review this portion of the Word. The first observation from this pericope is to take note of *The unremitting efforts of the Evil One to destroy the Christ*. God pronounced that the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent [see GENESIS 3:15], From that day, Satan sought to destroy the lineage of the Holy One.

Israel was enslaved in Egypt, but God delivers His people. They rebelled in the wilderness, and an entire generation was proscribed from entering into the Promised Land. David succumbed to temptation, leading God to punish the man after His own heart. Repeatedly, David succumbs to temptation, even allowing himself to be incited to number the people of Israel and bringing divine judgement upon the nation. Solomon is led to dishonour God through his multiple marriages, leading at last to a division of the nation. Kings are raised up who pursue God, only to be followed by a successor who leads the people into gross sin. God continually intervenes through prophets raised up to declare the mind of the Lord until at last the nation is conquered and the people dispossessed. Yet, even in Babylonian captivity God works to preserve a remnant.

At last the people return to God and they are restored to the land, but the Faith of the Living God degenerates into dry ritual and repetitious routine. Then, when it appears that darkness prevails and religious fervour is at the lowest ebb, God sends His Son. Therefore, we read, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” [GALATIANS 4:4, 5].

This is what the Revelator witnessed when he wrote, “When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child” [REVELATION 12:13]. Satan sought to disrupt the plan of God to send His Son into the world. When Satan could not thwart God’s plan, he incited religious leaders to kill the Lamb of God. The Living God was at work even in this dark hour, transforming the dark evil of the wicked one into an opportunity to secure life for His elect.

This is the meaning of Paul’s statement, “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” [COLOSSIANS 2:13-15].

There is another observation I commend to you—*The ordinariness of Jesus’ family*. Sacerdotalists perhaps wish to exalt Joseph and Mary to positions of pre-eminence among the faithful. However, to do so dishonours the truth of the Word. Joseph was a man with all the flaws of a mere man. He was obedient to God, and he did act with courage when called upon to do hard tasks. Similarly, Mary was but a woman, under sentence of death as we are. She was prepared to do the will of God, and for that we honour her obedience. Their home was ordinary, not dissimilar to other homes around them. They worked and worshipped and sought to honour God. Any claim to greatness they might have arose because of their willingness to do what God appointed them to do. Any greatness was the result of their obedience to God.

A final observation is that *The purposeful nature of Christ’s early years is emphasised*. Jesus was born to die. His death, however, was not to be a tragedy. He came to give Himself as a sacrifice for sinful people. From earliest days, this movement toward the cross is evident. Think of a few instances when His sacrifice is in view.

After Simeon had blessed the child when Joseph and Mary had taken him to the Temple, he blessed the family and “said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed’” [LUKE 2:34, 35].

When Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist saw Him coming toward him, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [JOHN 1:29]! He would repeat this declaration the next day, leading two of his disciples to follow Jesus [JOHN 1:35, 36].

Jesus was born to give His life as a sacrifice for sin. He came as the Lamb of God. This is our invitation to you who hear the message today, receive the sacrifice that God has provided in His Son. This is the promise of God, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. The Apostle concludes that appeal with the words of the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Believe this message; receive this Saviour. Be saved today. Amen.