



Déjà vu¹: Out of Egypt!

Genesis 46:1-7, 26-27 Romans 4:1-8 Matthew 2:13-23

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It's less than a week since we celebrated Christmas, and in the Gospel lesson from Matthew, the **peace and joy and beauty** of Christmas is shattered by the violence and ugliness of King Herod who intends to kill the infant Savior, the King of the Jews.

This is one of the **most tragic stories²** in all of Holy Scripture. As an angel directs Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, King Herod sends his troops into Bethlehem to kill all the boys two years old or younger. In Church history, this is called **The Holy Innocents**. Those children died because King Herod thought one of them was the Christ. They foreshadow **all the martyrs** who witness to Christ through their death. King Herod was threatened by news of the Messianic Son of King David who the Old Testament promised would come to rule over God's people and have an eternal Kingdom.

The **Holy Innocents** remind us that our **peace and joy** of Christmas could very easily be shattered at any time by the violence of persecution. You may not have an army hunting you down like those little boys in Bethlehem, but you will have people ridicule you, persecute you, insult you, and exclude you because of Christ. Jesus warns us that they will say *all kinds of evil and false things* against you simply because you trust in Christ, confess His Name, and live a holy life. **The world hates the Savior; because His Word exposes their sins.** This is how St. John described it:

¹ **Déjà vu** is a French term describing the feeling that one has lived through the present situation before. In the context of this sermon, the term is being used to highlight the type/antitype connection between God's Old Testament "son" (the Israelites) and God's eternal Son Jesus both coming "out of Egypt". By this connection, Matthew teaches us that Jesus is on an "Exodus" that will set all people free from slavery to sin; and that He – unlike the Israelites – will perfectly obey the Will of God in every aspect on our behalf!

² It's been 23 years ago, but I still remember hearing this story the first time after Roxanne and I had our first daughter Kristen, and *it virtually took my breath away!* As a parent, it is almost unfathomable to imagine the pain of those parents in Bethlehem that day!

The light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. JOHN 3:19-20

You can **expect** persecution for the sake of the Savior; and if you are persecuted, **remain faithful**, **patiently endure**, and find a way to **rejoice**³ - -- because in the same way they persecuted the prophets, the Holy Innocents, and countless Christians before you!

You are in good company when you are persecuted, and the Lord will be your strength to keep you faithful and bold.

Jesus escapes King Herod, because God did not send His Son into the world to die as a **martyr in Bethlehem**, but rather to give up His life as the **Savior in Jerusalem**. Jesus came into the world to be the “Savior”, as His Name teaches us: **He will save His people from their sins!** He will do that with His sacrificial death on the cross where He takes upon Himself all of our guilt and sin.

Matthew teaches us that Jesus, the Son of God, fled to Egypt just as the Old Testament people of Israel --- the “son” of God --- fled to Egypt in the Old Testament times. **Do you remember the Old Testament story?**

God arranged Joseph to be a powerful ruler in Egypt. During a famine in Israel, Joseph brought his father Jacob and his brothers to Egypt for food, shelter, and safety. They remained in Egypt for 400 years, growing from a group of 70 to a *vast multitude* that threatened the Pharaoh of Egypt.

In fear, the Pharaoh made them slaves and treated them harshly. They cried out to the Lord for help and the Lord heard their prayer. God sent Moses to deliver them. It would take 10 plagues to soften Pharaoh’s heart ...culminating with the thick darkness over the land (9th Plague) that warned of the terrible 10th plague: *the death of the firstborn*.

³ Note the closing of the “Beatitudes” in Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

God spared His own people that night when they sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on the doorframes of their homes. The angel of death “*passed over*” their homes that night, they were spared, and their first born survived. However, the Egyptians’ firstborn sons died that night, including Pharaoh’s. The very next morning, Pharaoh let God's people go. God led His people **out of Egypt**, through the Red Sea, and on their way to the Promised Land. **This is the great salvation story of the Old Testament.**

And this great salvation story of the Old Testament was a *foreshadow and a type* of the great New Testament salvation story that will happen through Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Matthew makes the connection for us in this passage:

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.*” Matthew 2:14-15

God brings His Son **out of Egypt**, like He brought His Old Testament “son” – the Israelites --- **out of Egypt** in the Old Testament times. But unlike Israel who would rebel against God, disobey His commandments, and fall into all kinds of idolatry and immorality, **God's only begotten Son will remain faithful and obedient throughout his life.**

Jesus takes the place of all of us under the Commandments of God, and HE NEVER BREAKS THEM. His **perfectly obedient life** is credited to you through faith, and God considers you holy and righteous. **You are not holy and righteous in and of yourself, you are holy and righteous through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ---who took your place under the Commandments of God and perfectly obeyed them!** Jesus lived a perfect life for you: God is not waiting for you to live a perfect life. You couldn’t if you tried.

Sin has corrupted us all – *from the bottom of our feet to the top of our head* --- as Martin Luther described it! We could never live a perfectly holy and

righteous life. So, God sent His Son Jesus to do it for us. Jesus lived a perfectly obedient life for you and in your place. That life is **credited**⁴ to you as “holiness and righteousness”! The word that is used in the New Testament is a banking term: just as money is *transferred* from one account to another, so too, holiness and righteousness are *transferred* from Jesus’ “account” and into yours! **When God looks into your “account”, He does not see your sin, but He sees Christ’s holiness!** You are righteous in God’s eyes; you are declared “Not guilty!” of your sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

This **holiness and righteousness** of Christ changes you! In response to what God has done for you in Christ, you now live holy and righteous lives of faith!

- + That’s the good works you do
- + That’s prayer and worship and receiving Holy Communion frequently
- + That’s the Fruit of the Spirit in your life
- + It’s using your gifts to glorify God and serve other people.

**Because Christ’s holiness and righteousness
has been “credited” to you *through faith*: it changes you!
You now live a holy and righteous life *in faith*!**

What the Israelites --- *and all of us* --- failed to do because of sin, Jesus will do perfectly. “**Out of Egypt**” God called His Son to live a perfect life and die a sacrificial death for all people! He is the Savior God sent for you! He is your substitute both in life and in death.

In Him, you are righteous and holy!

Amen!

⁴ If you want to study this New Testament banking image of “credit” further, see Romans 4, where the word “credit” (λογίζομαι) is used 14x! (see Romans 4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24; compare with 1 Corinthians 1:30) It is important to note that this righteousness is by objective “imputation” and never subjective “infusion” – in other words, it is NOT like a booster shot that the Lord gives you so you can start to earn your own righteousness. Rather Christ’s righteousness is “credited/transferred”; it is an act of God that comes through faith. Martin Luther called it an “alien righteousness” as it originates and comes from Christ and not ourselves. In Isaiah 61:10 it is described as a “*robe of righteousness*”, again, highlighting something that is given to us, outside of us; not something inside of us nor something that we are to achieve ourselves.