

Pako Morning Service 5/2/2017

Readings: Mat 2:13-18; Message: "The Father's care of our Saviour"

Congregation while visiting the Netherlands recently, it was good to know a little about my history and where I was born and meet some cousins I had never met before. However, it wasn't such a big deal and it certainly wasn't a life changing event for anyone else. However, we cannot say that about the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew in writing his gospel is keen to make his readers aware of the importance of Jesus' history, and that his birth is the fulfilment of the promises of God contained in the Old Testament.

In Ch 1:1 he links Jesus with father Abraham. In 1:21 he points out that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Saviour of sinners (Mt 1:21). In 1:23 he points out that He is the "Immanuel" – which means, "God with us." The wise men bowed down and worshiped him (Mt 2:1-12) as the new born King. Today, Matthew teaches us about the Father's care of our Saviour! His young life was in imminent danger! Although Herod's piously says to the wise men in v8 that he also wants to worship the new Born king, his real intention is to kill Him.

In 40 B.C. the Roman senate had conferred upon Herod the title, "King of the Jews." However, when the wise men came to say they wished to worship the new Born King, King Herod was terribly insecure. In his insecurity Herod had already killed three sons, two brothers-in-law, a wife, and countless others not related to him. He was probably worse than North Korea's Kim Jong-un. And now he has the baby Jesus in his sights. But God in his providence prevented the Magi from reporting back to Herod and caused them to return to their country by another route (v12). And then the Lord, again in providential care sends an angel to Joseph to warn him about Herod's intentions and that he should get up take Mary and the new born babe, and go to Egypt.

The text doesn't say whether they went by donkey or some other way to travel the 320 kilometres, but we can assume that it probably took them a week, perhaps even ten days. However, the question we are confronted with is, "Why did God command them to go to Egypt?" God could have blinded Herod's eyes to Jesus' whereabouts. In fact, he could have snuffed out Herod's life! I suggest that Matthew records Jesus' escape to Egypt to show the fulfillment of OT history and the Father's love for his Son and ultimately for us. At one level, Herod's power did not reach to Egypt so the Christ-Child would be safe there. That's fairly plain.

Second, historically, Egypt has been the land of refuge for those fleeing from Palestine for one reason or another. It was in Egypt that Jacob and his family found refuge during the years of famine in Canaan (Gen 42f). When King Solomon sought to put Jeroboam to death, "Jeroboam fled to Egypt" (1 Kings 11:40). When King Jehoiakim sought to kill the prophet Uriah, he fled and escaped to Egypt (Jer 26:21).

When the citizens of Judah killed the governor that Nebuchadnezzar had placed over them, they forced the prophet Jeremiah to flee with them to Egypt (Jer 41:17). In light of all this, it was only natural that Egypt was the place that Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus went to for safety. But again, why does Matthew even mention this escape to Egypt?

Well, remembering that Matthew is reaching out to his Jewish audience, he quotes Scripture to show that history is being fulfilled in Christ. Note verse 15, "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Hos 11:1) This is a quote from the prophet Hosea at that time the nation of Israel was seen as God's son. Matthew sees this prophecy as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is He, who is the Son of God, who is now being called out of Egypt. In other words, Jesus fulfils, in His own life the greatest salvation event of the Old Testament – the Exodus of God's people Israel from Egypt.

But there is more. In v16 of our text, Herod, "...gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi." It's horrendous isn't it? Not all that different from what is happening in some middle eastern countries today by cruel dictator's intent on holding onto power. The scene in Bethlehem that day must have been heart-rendering. Mothers must have clung desperately to their little boys when they heard the soldiers marching down the street going from door-to-door.

Fathers must have tried to hide their sons in secret hiding places. And when the soldiers were done with their ghastly and deadly work, wailing mothers were holding their dead babies and powerless fathers sobbed in rage, perhaps clenched their fists, and silently vowed to get even. By recording this account, Matthew's Jewish audience would immediately have flash backs to the Pharaoh of Egypt who shed the blood of Hebrew children.

Initially, all the boys born to the Hebrew women were to be killed by the midwives. When this scheme failed, Pharaoh commanded that all the baby boys be thrown into the Nile where they would either drown, be eaten by crocodiles, or killed by poisonous water snakes. Matthew tells us about the Bethlehem massacre to show what was said through the prophet Jeremiah in Ch 31:15, was being fulfilled. Verse 18, "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Bethlehem and Herod's ghastly command makes Matthew think of Rachel, the wife of Jacob who died near Bethlehem giving birth to a son. With her last breath before she died she named this son "Ben-Oni," which means "son of my trouble" (Gen 35:18). When we look at the actual prophecy of Jeremiah, we see that Jeremiah thinks of the crying of Rachel at the time of the captivity and deportation of Judah in 590 B.C. You can imagine the scene. Jerusalem has just been conquered. The city has been set on fire. The victorious soldiers loot, rape, and kill. Those not killed – mostly women and children – were taken to Ramah. You can almost hear their desperate, painful cries.

So for Matthew the blood of Bethlehem calls to mind the two greatest crises faced by God's Old Testament people. The blood of the Hebrew children in Egypt and also the blood of the Exile. We can draw another similarity between the two stories. Matthew tells us about the rescue of the baby Jesus, the Saviour, from the designs and plans of a wicked King Herod. The Exodus also tells us about the rescue of another infant, another type of Saviour, the baby Moses, from the designs and plans of the wicked Pharaoh in Egypt. Once again, history is not merely being repeated in Jesus Christ, rather, Matthew's intention is to show that it is being fulfilled in Christ.

Matthew then, in mentioning all this is desperately trying to show to his fellow Jews that in Jesus, God's greatest act of salvation is about to take place. The rescue of the baby Moses and the Exodus of Israel from Egypt is as nothing compared to what will happen at the cross and the empty grave through this new born King. Hence, it was vital that God the Father protect his vulnerable Son, no doubt because of his great love for Him, but also so that his plan of salvation for sinners who repent and believe is fulfilled and not thwarted by the hands of sinful men.

And so what great reason for thanksgiving. A murdered baby Jesus at the hands of Herod, would mean no forgiveness and salvation for us. However, we will only ever really appreciate God the Father's protection of His Son if we understand the great roadblock that our sin causes before a holy God. I put it to you, that generally, we don't think nearly enough about our sin and what a great offense it is before God. In fact, I would go so far as to say, we are inclined to belittle our sin. And if we are inclined to do so, then we never fully appreciate what God has done for us in protecting the baby Jesus and the great salvation he has secured for us through His Son many years later.

What God has done for his people in and through His son is a far greater salvation than what Moses achieved; far greater than Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land, even greater than King David and all his victories! What Jesus achieved in bringing about our sure salvation isn't just about freedom from the chains of slavery or returning to some piece of dirt in Palestine, but to save sinners to eternal life by being the ultimate sacrifice for their sins and now being free to serve Him.

The Apostle Peter said a similar thing in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." This means that the salvation and freedom of the past, whether it be from Egypt, or from Babylon, or from Pharaoh or from some modern day dictator is as nothing compared to the salvation and freedom that is ours in Christ.

The results of God's acts of deliverance in the past are but a "shadow" of the salvation we have in Christ and that await the people of God (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 10:1). In Christ "God had planned something better for us" who believe (Heb 11:40). That's why it is so important to understand the Father's love for His Son and to understand who Jesus is. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Mt 16:15). He is the Son of God, the Christ, the Saviour of sinners!

And on us, says Paul, "the fulfilment of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Therefore, ours is a better Saviour, who endured a worst suffering, and gives us a better salvation. How ironic. As a helpless babe, God cares for his Son. Yet, thirty odd years later, there is no intervention by His Father in heaven. Even when Jesus prayed earnestly to remove the dreadful cup of wrath, the Father's answer was not to remove it, but for His Son to bear in his body and soul the wrath of His Father's anger for our sin. Amazing love!

Three points of application. First, it is probable that Mary and Joseph wondered about what God was doing through Herod when he sent the angel and told them to flee to Egypt. They had been told by the angel that this baby Jesus was going to be the Saviour of sinners. And now this happens, they literally need to run for their lives. Sometimes God does

that, even with our lives. We have it all neatly planned out, but sometimes, things don't fall into place as we had so carefully planned. And sometimes this can cause extreme angst for us and we may be left asking all sorts of questions. Let us at those times minister to each other that God has it all in hand and he knows what he is doing. And perhaps even at those times it is good to remember the past and how God has brought us through at other times when things haven't fallen neatly into place. He has promised to be with us until the end of the age and that promise stands forever. Nothing in all creation can separate us from his love.

Second, this account of the Father's protection of His Son, the fulfillment of all those OT promises show us that God is faithful and true. Nothing can thwart His plans. What he says will happen. Utterly dependable. So don't trust in your own strength, but cast yourself on Him, and he will bring you home.

Third, God's faithfulness, his dependability, should bring about a life of thanksgiving. You see, while God gives us breath, we can either hate him like Herod and like so many in the world do, seen by their godless living, or by his grace, we can bow down before Him and worship Him.

We can either live in obedience and thankfulness or we can live in disobedience and ungratefulness and suffer the consequences. I pray that it may be the former and not the latter. Yes, living in obedience to the new born King will have consequences here and now, and yes, it doesn't come automatically. Sometimes you just need to slow down and think consciously about your life before a holy God and what he has done for you in Christ. No more living for self. No more putting your own needs and likes and dislikes first.

On the contrary, everything you do and say and think needs to go through the Jesus' filter. But we gladly do so for our desire is to live for him and to make him known. We want our families and friends, our employer or employees, our work colleagues and our school mates to know Jesus as their Saviour and bow the knee with us before the ultimate King. To that end may our lifestyles, our living, our thinking and doing be winsome. Amen.