

“I’ll Be Home For Christmas” Sunday After Advent December, 31 2017

Matthew 2:13-15

SI: These Sundays of December we’re looking at Christ’s Advent through the lens of home. What does it mean to be home for Christmas?

The big idea in all four of these Advent sermons is that Jesus is our home.

He came into this world to make his home with us and in us.

Now he’s preparing a home for us. One day he will come to take us home.

Alienation you feel in this world. Your feelings of loneliness or sadness.

Your longing for identity and security. At root those are homesickness for God.

Detached from him, can never find a fully satisfied home here.

That’s why Jesus came.

So to be home for Christmas is to know Jesus and be with him.

I was going to finish last Sunday,

but there’s one more Scripture passage I want us to look at with this theme.

INTRO: If you Google the words “flight to Egypt” and then click on images, you will not get pictures of airplanes you will get numerous paintings of Joseph leading a donkey with Mary and baby Jesus riding on it. This episode in Jesus’ life has been a favorite of religious artists through years—the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt to escape from King Herod. Most artwork shows them actually traveling on the road. But there is a painting by the Italian artist Gentileschi which shows them stopped to rest. Mary is breastfeeding baby Jesus and Joseph is on his back out like a light. It’s a very human touch. Joseph looks exhausted.

I’m sure he was exhausted.

When the angel’s warning came it says he left that very night.

And all the things he had to worry about—Herod’s police, are they chasing us? Bandits on the road to Egypt, a 350 mile trip by foot.

What am I going to do when I get there to support my family?

I’m sure Mary was tired too. She had to stay up and take care of the baby.

But that painting really gave me sympathy for Joseph.

Because it made me imagine the pressure a husband and father would feel if he was fleeing with his family as refugees to a foreign country.

I read this week that in 2017 there were 65 million displaced persons worldwide.

These are people forced out of their homes by things like war, violence, famine.

Refugees from the war in Syria. People fleeing gang violence in Honduras.

This passage certainly ought to give us sympathy for refugees—

knowing that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was a refugee as a child.

There are other Bible passages that specifically tell us to be kind to aliens and strangers, like Leviticus 19.

So it would be ok for a pastor to use this text to challenge the congregation if there were refugees in the community who needed Christian love.

But even though that may be a valid application,

I don’t think that’s what this passage is primarily about.

Matthew’s purpose it to tell us about Jesus, who he is, what he came to do

So let’s look at the flight to Egypt under three points. We’ll see how Jesus is:

1. The object of hatred
2. The agent of grace
3. The climax of the plan

Credit where credit is due. Sermons by Sean Lucas, Tim Keller

MP#1 Jesus is the object of hatred

The Holy Family had to flee to Egypt because King Herod wanted to murder Jesus.

That's not surprising since historians say he was paranoid and violent.

He killed his wife and three of his sons because he thought they were plotting
But Luke explains that it wasn't just Herod who hated Jesus.

In Luke 2, when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised,
the old man Simeon saw the baby Jesus and got a divine revelation.

He took Jesus in his arms and said:

This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign
that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

Then he said to Mary:

And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Those prophetic words revealed that Jesus would provoke hostility and hatred.

Why is that? Two reasons and they're really two sides of the same coin.

The first reason Jesus is the object of hatred is because of his claims.

Magi came from east and asked, Where is the one born King of the Jews?

When Herod heard that he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

If you are king and want to stay king but hear there is another king, it disturbs you.

But Jesus doesn't just claim the title King of the Jews.

He claims the title King of kings. He's king over every person on earth.

Jesus doesn't say: Tell me your needs and I'll meet them.

Ask me your questions and I'll answer them.

He says: I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to Father but by me.

I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the bread of life.

I am the Alpha and the Omega.

And when he calls people to follow him he doesn't let us choose the terms.

He says: Unless you are willing to take up cross, can't be my disciple.

Unless you hate father and mother, can't be my disciple.

No man can serve two masters. Cannot serve both God and money.

He even says to cut off your hand, pluck out your eye rather than disobey.

He demands total allegiance. His claim over you is complete.

So that's the first reason.

The other reason, and the other side of the coin, is that all people have an
inborn hostility people have towards God's authority. Romans 8.

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

In every human heart there is a little king herod sitting on the throne.

The reason you don't have to teach children to disobey parents is because parental authority is derived from God's authority.

Children have a little king herod in there who has temper-tantrums.

Let me give you a more grown-up, sophisticated version.

Philosopher Thomas Nagel:

I want atheism to be true. I am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that don't believe in God . . . I hope that there is no God. I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. This cosmic authority problem is not rare and I doubt that there is anyone who is genuinely indifferent as to whether there is a God.

That's remarkably honest. He's saying that he's not objective about his atheism.

He knows there's a little king herod in heart who hates idea of cosmic authority.

You're a follower of Jesus. He's the object of hatred. What do you do with that?

First, you shouldn't be at all surprised when the church and Christianity is attacked.

You shouldn't be surprised if you are criticized for your faith.

Remember what Jesus said in John 15

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Even though it will certainly bother you and sadden you, you need to take a bigger view and realize this is a confirmation of who you are.

But closer to home.

As a Christian, you must take into consideration the residual hostility in heart.

You're at peace with God and reconciled. But you still have residual hostility.

Paul calls it the old self, the old man.

Why so hard to pray, to concentrate?

Why when prayer is answered, say I'll never forget this. Then you do?

I'll never do this again. Never commit sin again. Then you do?

Romans 7. What I hate I do.

There's a little king herod still in there and he needs to be put to death.

Can't just glide through Christianity.

New Year approaching. Where do you need to grow and change?

What Christian friends are you going to enlist to help you?

How are you going to use gifts, sacrifice for kingdom, love of Christ?

MP#2 Jesus is the agent of grace.

After some time in Egypt, King Herod died and Joseph returned.

Did you notice where he first wanted to go? The land of Israel, but specifically, he went back to live in Judea. Judea was the southern region of Israel.

That's where Jerusalem was. That's where Bethlehem was.

Joseph was probably heading back to Bethlehem.

But when he found out Herod's son Archelaus was reigning there, he went to the district of Galilee, up north, and settled in town of Nazareth.

Now, a question. Joseph and Mary were from Galilee originally.

So why didn't they make that their first choice?

Why didn't they just head right there after Egypt?

Instead, their first choice Judea and they were basically forced back to Nazareth.

One possible reason is that Judea was a more desirable place to live than Galilee.

People from Galilee were looked down upon by other Jews.

Jews from Galilee were hicks from the sticks.

Judea was the heart of the Jewish homeland. Jerusalem was an international city.

If you could live close to Jerusalem, which Bethlehem was, about five miles away that would mean his son would have access to better synagogue schools, the status of their family would be raised in the eyes of relatives back home.

More economic opportunity.

Instead the family ended up not just in Galilee, but in Nazareth.

Do you remember that interesting conversation about Nazareth in John chapter 1?

Philip meets Jesus and goes to his friend Nathaniel and says:

You've got to come meet someone. I think he could be the Messiah.

Nathaniel asks: Where's he from? When Philip says, From Nazareth,

Nathaniel says—Can anything good come from Nazareth?

So that tells us that even in Galilee, even among the hicks from the sticks

there was a pecking order, and Nazareth was at the bottom of the pile.

It's like the joke we make in Alabama: Thank goodness for Mississippi.

I may be from Galilee, but at least I don't live in Nazareth.

In this world there's always a pecking order.

The school you went to. Where you're from. Who's your daddy.

God doesn't operate like that.

How does God work?

In a culture that always honored the eldest son and marginalized younger sons,

God chose Abel not Cain, he chose Isaac not Ishmael,
he chose Jacob not Esau, Ephraim not Manasseh,
he chose Judah, son number four, not Reuben, Simeon, or Levi.
he chose David even though he was the youngest of all his brothers.
In a culture that shamed widows and barren women God chose
Sarah and Ruth to be grandmothers of the Messiah,
and Hannah to be the mother of Samuel, the father of the prophets
He chose the unloved and unlovely wife Leah to be the mother of a line of kings,
not the loved and favored wife Rachel.
God chose the boys who were forgotten, the girls nobody wanted,
the hick town Nazareth instead of glorious Jerusalem as the hometown of Jesus.

Why? Is it just that God loves underdogs? No. It's a demonstration of grace.
All the great world religions and the default mode of the human heart says:
There is a code, there a program and here's how you are saved:
You summon up your strength and your discipline and you live like this.
Jesus says: No. You're saved by what I do. I'm the only perfect man.

Jesus came for the weak, he came for sinner and for those who are able to admit and
know they are weak. That's why there is this marvelous thread running through
the Bible of God choosing the weak and undesirable. To show it's by grace.
There's an old Christmas carol:
Seek not in Courts or Palaces, Nor royal Curtains draw;
But search the Stable, see your God Extended on the Straw.

So, application. If Jesus is the agent of grace then it doesn't matter who you are
or what you have done. Your failures and your deep dark secrets don't matter.
Doesn't matter who you are or what you've done.
God saves and works through anybody who knows his need. Close to poor in heart.

Also means that in the church pedigree and status and wealth and education and
race and natural family connections need to be left behind at the door.
Our identity is Christ. Our boast is that we are people saved by grace.
We can have a pecking order in the church.
It's the people in our body who are the most kind and humble and happy,
whose lives exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.
It's the people who show us what it means to live by faith. That's what we admire.
Because we follow Jesus, and he's the agent of grace.

MP#3 Jesus is the climax of the plan

Did you notice that in this passage Matthew several times quotes the prophets? After Joseph took his family out of Egypt and back to Israel Matthew says that this fulfills what was said through the prophet:

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

That’s from Hosea 11.

And then later, when Herod slaughters the male children of Bethlehem he says again that the words of the prophet are fulfilled and quotes Jeremiah 31. “Rachel weeping for her children.”

Now here’s the interesting thing. If you looked up those two passages.

If you read Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15 and read the whole context you would be perplexed, because they’re not prophecies about the Messiah. They are both poetic descriptions of historical events.

The first one, “Out of Egypt I called my son” is referring to the Exodus.

It’s referring to Israel being brought out of slavery in Egypt by Moses.

Israel as a nation is often referred to as God’s son.

Other passages, Israel is referred to as God’s wife, other places as God’s servant, and as his vineyard—it’s all poetic language about Israel’s history.

The Jeremiah passage about weeping in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children is another description of a historical event. It’s about the Babylonian exile.

Describing the weeping and sadness of those families who had loved ones taken away into captivity in Babylon. There is a promise they will return. Which did. Once again, it’s Israel’s history.

Neither one of these passages mention the Messiah.

Neither one are prophecies foretelling future events.

So why does Matthew say they are prophecies fulfilled in Jesus?

Because here’s how Matthew read the Old Testament.

He looked at everything that happened to Israel, every historical event, and understood that they were all advance echoes of Christ.

When Matthew read his Bible he saw Jesus everywhere.

The Israelites go down to Egypt and are slaves for 400 years.

But then God brings them out and into the Promised Land.

Jesus goes down to Egypt, God brings his Son out to lead us to Promised Land.

Jesus is the true Exodus from slavery.

Are you enslaved by sin? In him you are taken out of slavery.

Are you suffering exile and sadness? Have people you love been taken from you?

Are you weeping? Does home no longer feel like home?
Jesus is the one who will end exile and turn mourning into dancing.
Now, this may sound like complicated, high theology.
Jesus the fulfillment of Israel's history. But let me show you how practical this is.

There are two ways to read the Bible.
You can read it as a book of moral lessons.

Don't be like Adam and eat the fruit. Be like Abraham and obey when tested.
Be like Joseph and resist temptation. Be like David, be brave and kill giants.
Don't be like David and commit adultery. Be like Daniel in lion's den.
And here's the biggest one—Be like Jesus.
If you read the Bible that way it will crush you.
And you will either give up or make it all about externals and turn yourself
into an unbearable, self-righteous Pharisee.

Or, you can read the Bible like Matthew read it—not as a book of moral lessons—
but as a book about Jesus Christ.

It's not a set of stories for how to live, it's a plan of salvation Jesus fulfilled.
He's the better Adam who passed test, not in the Garden of Eden, Gethsemane.
He's the better Isaac. Isaac's life was spared, but Jesus sacrificed.
He's the better Esther. She risked her life for her people, he gave his life.
He's the true Moses, the true David, the true Jonah, the true Israel.

He's the one person who did everything that God asked him to do perfectly.
Everything God asked Israel to do—Ten Commandments, Tabernacle, Laws,
the Passover Lamb—nobody ever did them all right except Jesus.
He's the perfect law-keeper and the perfect sacrifice.
He did what all the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel could not do.
He lived the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died.
And if you believe in him, you get the blessing and honor he deserves.

When you get the perfect record of Jesus, when his life and death yours by faith,
when forgiveness is yours, when his Holy Spirit is yours—then you can say—
Ok, what does the Bible teach me and show me about how to live a grateful life?
How did Abraham live by faith? How did David live by faith?
And how did Jesus himself fulfill the law of love? Example. Savior first.
New Year tomorrow. Let's make it about Jesus, fulfillment of plan.
Live before him every day in grateful amazement.