

Going To Egypt?  
Matthew 2:13-23  
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Just a two weeks ago we celebrated Christmas. In most homes there were decorations to remind us of the season and the joy the gift of Christ causes. But now, Christmas has passed and we are moving into a new year and battling a deep winter and a continuing virus. Among the things we normally do is to put away Christmas. We take down the decorations and pack them carefully. And we always comment that the most difficult thing to put up is the tinsel on the tree. We have to take it off, strand by strand, and wrap it carefully to be used again next year. But, have you ever wondered, why we put tinsel on our trees in the first place?

Some say it's snow and ice, merely a winter decoration, for the tree we love so much. Some say it comes from a German tale about a Christmas where poor children found a tree but didn't have the money to buy decorations for the tree, so it sat in a corner, unadorned. Spiders in the house heard the children's lament about no money for tree decorations. On Christmas Eve the spiders gathered and spun web after web to stand in the place of decorations. On Christmas day the children were thrilled with the webs and realized what was in their hearts was far more important than store bought decorations. It's a great story, and it might be the reason we use tinsel, but there is an older and even more significant explanation of the tinsel. This story also involves a spider.

The story comes from the event described in Matthew 2: 13-23, which I will read after I share the story with you. It seems that on the night the Magi left Jesus and headed home by another route to avoid Herod, Joseph had a dream, and in the dream the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and told him to get up, to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because Herod was mad and was going to kill all the boy children in Bethlehem to be sure a new king wasn't coming to take his place. Joseph got up and started on the 10 to 15 day walk to Egypt. It wasn't long before Herod found out the Magi had gone home and not come back to him as requested. He sent his troops to find Jesus. Joseph learned of this and kept on going, but after a long night, he had to stop and rest; so did Mary and Jesus.

Joseph saw a cave and went in and they all slept. Before he slept he worried out loud about Herod's troops and prayed they would not catch them. A spider in the cave heard and went to work weaving a web across the entrance to the cave. Back and forth the spider went until he had a big web across the entrance. Joseph and Mary and Jesus slept.

Soon, Herod's troops came to the place where Joseph and the babe slept. Herod's troops saw the cave and started for it. As they drew near, the Captain of the guard saw the spider web across the door and said to his men, "we don't have to check in here; look at the spider web; no one's been in here for a while." The noise had awakened Joseph and he watched fearing the worst. Then he heard the soldiers talk about the web and they left. Soon, Joseph restarted his journey and made it to Egypt and brought Jesus and Mary to safety. To remember and honor the work of the spider, we today bedeck our Christmas trees with tinsel, draped to look like a spider's web on our trees.

That's the legend; now let's hear Matthew's version of the story from Matthew 2:13-23

## Matthew 2

- 13 When they (the Magi) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.  
The angel said, "Get up and take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."
- 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,
- 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."
- 16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he 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.
- 17 Then, what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled.
- 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.”
- 19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph  
in Egypt,
- 20 and said, Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of  
Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.
- 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of  
Israel.
- 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of  
his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a  
dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
- 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled  
what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a  
Nazarene.

### The Word Of The Lord!

No spiders in Matthew, but the legend of the spider and the tinsel is a strong reminder of the flight of Jesus from the paranoid, power hungry, pusillanimous (cowardly) Herod. The Magi came and when they came face to face with Jesus, they worshipped him. When Herod heard there might be another to become “King of the Jews, “ he shook in rage and raged so wildly that all of Jerusalem knew what was going on. And then when the wise men came, he schemed and lied; and when he realized the wise men had duped him, he raged again and ordered the death of all who might be in the pretender’s class. Machiavelli would have loved Herod, because he was following the first order for a prince—get the power and once you have it, do everything you have to, to hang on to it, no matter what. No matter what!

Consider this--Herod—had a chance to see and know Jesus and to welcome God to earth, but he couldn't or he wouldn't and no question about it -- didn't. And I am confident Herod does not live today.

Then, there was Joseph. God spoke to him in dreams. Joseph listened. God's messenger told Joseph what God wanted him to do. Joseph did it. Joseph was a man who walked with God, Followed God, Obeyed God. First time; no quibbling; no delays. God said it; Joseph did it. Another sermon!

But, why Egypt? There are many theories but one stands out, one we ought to hear as the teaching point to remember. The origin of the point goes back to the time when Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt, a rescue led by Moses, a man sent from God to rescue his people.

Moses came and rescued the children of Israel and led them to the promised land. So did Jesus.

Moses revealed God's thoughts and word. So did Jesus.

Moses didn't live to see God's promise fulfilled; so it was with Jesus.

I could add even more similarities but the truth is, both lived and did what they did to teach us something. So, what is that something?

Remember when Israel camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai? Remember that it was God who spoke to them and told them according to Exodus 19:5

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,  
then out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine,  
you will be for me

a kingdom of priests and  
a holy nation.

These are the words you are to speak

Israel was chosen and given a job to do at Mt. Sinai —be priests for God. They were to be a whole kingdom of priests. What God was saying, I want to use you to tell the world about me, to take me to the people of the world and to bring the people of the world to me. I am now revealing myself to you; once you have it



go and tell the world. From Egypt, the pit of slavery God freed a people and asked them to tell the world about the God of love, the God of the second chance, the God who loves you. Israel went as a people set aside and their lives showed what God asked.

And here we are again, this time the baby Jesus is headed for Egypt. This time Joseph is told to go there, to wait there, to leave there when it's time, to raise God's son. This time Joseph is God's priest and special person. Joseph has the job of protecting the faith that is to come, of nurturing the faith renewal that is to come. And Joseph did his job. So should we. So should we follow this faithful servant and love and obey God, every time God asks us to act. Like Joseph, we are called to protect the faith, to live a life listening to God and acting as God directs, no matter what, no matter if it means we have to go into our own Egypt's with the precious gift of faith, Living like Joseph means believing, following, listening, doing, exactly what God asks.

And then there's Jesus. He too will come out of Egypt, out of the place of sin and slavery. He too will become God's holy man and a priest for his Father. He will become the perfect fulfillment of what God asked Israel to be and to do 1200 years before. Jesus was a man with a mission, a man who would have God's power, a man tasked with revealing God to every man and bringing every man to God. Jesus was charged with doing exactly what God asked Israel to do in the beginning. So, Jesus, the model, went to Egypt to make sure we knew and we know that our job as God's people is to complete what God started with Israel in the beginning.

We will hear this again from the resurrected Jesus in Matthew 28:18 where Jesus' final words to his disciples go something like this:

28:18 Then Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.

Jesus' great commission is the same commission God gave Israel.

Both commissions came after a sojourn of safety in Egypt and a rescue from there by God of God's people.

Both involved a long time of preparation.

Both needed God's protection.

Both are exactly what God expects of us.

The story of the flight into Egypt to protect Jesus is there to remind us what God expects of us and who we are to become. The story says to each of us we will have an opportunity to hear and to obey and to take God to the world. But for each of us, we too will need a rescue from Egypt and we too will have to realize Egypt might look like a wonderful place, but it is a place to be from, it is the sin we need to leave behind. Egypt is supposed to remind us that we have been rescued by God for a purpose:

To tell the world about God,  
to live as God would have us,  
to love and be loved.

God loves us so much, but we have a job to do, if we are truly his special people.

So the question today is: Have you left your Egypt? Have you let God take over your life and send you to serve? It's not too late.

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