

**"Joseph, Shepherd of the Lamb"**  
**Matthew 2:13-15**

30 December Anno Domini 2001

Christmas 1

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In those days when the decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled, one generation did much the same as the previous generation. It is difficult for us to picture such a life without change and with such a slow pace. This fast-paced, ever-changing time that we live in makes it hard for us to think about what it must have been like. Think about your childhood and imagine what it would be like right now, if there had been no changes or updates in your house, neighborhood, technology and opportunity since you were ten years old.

In the day of the Herods, changes for the common people ... of house and home, of fields and vocation were not often undertaken. The use of ox and cart was the standard for hundreds of years. The tools of various trades probably didn't change all that much from a grandfather to his son and to his son's son. Indeed, that grandson, as one decade gave way to another, would become a father and see his children's children occupy themselves without much change for five generations. Oh, to be sure, there was the undulations of the seasons of nature and the rhythm of the feasts of the Church, but even they did not change that much from year to year. In fact, it would take something like a natural disaster, a decree of war, or the order of enrollment for there to be much change in the face of the land or the specific place where a person was born, lived and died.

Of course, plans do change. Joseph, who likely planned on being a carpenter for the rest of his life in his hometown and marrying that beautiful maiden named Mary, did not know what was in store for him. First was that announcement by Mary, his wife, that she was with Child and Joseph knew he was not the father. "Being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, [he] resolved to divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). That was his plan, and of course, plans change. Joseph is visited by and hears the announcement of an angel of the LORD, saying,

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' ... 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 borne a Son; and he called His name Jesus" (Matthew 1:20-21 & 24-25).

Joseph's life would never be the same. What a roller coaster ride for Joseph ... the trough of hurt when he discovered that Mary was with Child ... the height of joy when he is told that his wife's womb is the temple of the Christ Child. They make their trek to Bethlehem where the Messiah is

born. The Infant Redeemer is wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger for there was no room at the inn for mother, Baby and Joseph. Soon after the Birth of the Savior, the holy family moves into a house and waits for Mary's Firstborn to be circumcised on the eighth day when He "was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the LORD" (Luke 2:21-22).

A bit of peace at last for Joseph. A time to rest from the travels ... a respite to reflect on all the events that have happened ... a while to wait for the census to be completed before the trip back home to Galilee. It is night. Joseph is asleep. Please listen to Matthew 2:13-15 and hear of ...

... "Joseph, Shepherd of the Lamb"

"Now when they (the Magi) 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 till 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 have I called My Son.'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Although it has been a week since we heard of the Savior's Birth in Bethlehem, seven days since the visit by the shepherds to behold the Infant Redeemer in the manger, half a fortnight since the return of the same to their flocks ... "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Luke 2:20), our sermon text for this day is from a time that was many weeks later.

We are brought to a dramatic, frightening time within the exciting, thrilling history of the world. Mary and Joseph remain in Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, with their Savior, Jesus. Diabolical Herod is plotting the murder of the Child born King of the Jews. An angel of the Lord appears to the Wisemen in a dream and gives them a warning. The Gentile Magi disobey the governing authority in Jerusalem and head for home by a different route. Through it all, the LORD has been in control of the events and will continue to do so, as demonstrated in our sermon text.

Mary and Joseph are living as husband and wife in a house in Bethlehem. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, is a Child about one year old ... somewhere between two months and two years old. The magi, who saw the Bethlehem Star, planned their long journey and have arrived months later in Jerusalem, doing so in order to behold the recently born King of the Jews and to worship Him. To discover the specific directions, they seek and are given an audience with Herod the king. Herod finds out that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea and tells the magi, ...

"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). When the magi had heard Herod, "they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till 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" (Matthew 2:9-12).

It is night. Joseph is asleep. An angel of the LORD appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Rise, take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him." Awaken and arise, Joseph. Take the Child. While this Child is not your Child, the LORD has entrusted His Son to your care. You have been called to be a servant of the Word ... of the Word become flesh and dwelling among us. You are the shepherd of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Take the Child and His mother. She is your bride, also entrusted to your care. Flee to Egypt and remain there till I tell you. Joseph "rose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed to Egypt."

Though it is night, Joseph takes Jesus and Mary and departs the House of Bread and disappears into the Judean shadows. Like Genesis Joseph, Mary's husband is driven south into the land of Egypt ... the former by Ishmaelite traders causing a father's nightmare, the latter by the Word as delivered by an angel of the Lord in a dream. God has called Joseph the Carpenter to be the shepherd of the Lamb. Thus this man is the bishop of his beloved bride as well as God's Son, and this pastor is entrusted with the Word made flesh and the mother of God.

The pilgrimage is a long one and Joseph guides, leads and directs the little congregation of two - or actually, three - down into North Africa. There he waits, and as he waits, he carries out the various vocations that he has. He is foster father to Jesus and provides for the Child Who created the universe. He is husband to Mary and cares for his wife who is blessed above all women. He is shepherd of the Lamb, servant of Christ, head of the household and steward of these mysteries of God. This shepherd and his flock remained in Egypt "until the death of Herod."

Then the Word of the LORD came. "When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the LORD appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child's life are dead'" (Matthew 2:19-20). This is exactly what Joseph, shepherd of the Lamb, did. But this was not the call of God to Joseph only. No, there was also, and especially, the Call from the Father to His Son. "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son.'"

"Out of Egypt have I called My Son." The Call was from one place and to another; in this case, out of the land of bondage and to the Promised Land; specifically, out of Egypt and to Heaven. Thus Jesus, just as He had done in the days of Moses, leads His Church out of Egypt. The Passover Lamb, whether walking hand-in-hand or being carried, brought His mother and Joseph out of the Red Sea land. Here is the Lord and His Church on the Exodus that will, after the fullness of time in the wilderness journey, enter into the Promised Land.

The trio travels through the land where the LORD gave His Law to Moses on Mount Sinai ... the Law which is broken by sinful man, present company included. As the Holy Family traverses the wide wilderness on the Narrow Way to the land of milk and honey, there is Jesus, the Living Water from the Rock, the Manna from above, the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. He is Present with His own and provides for each of them. His continued Presence is a blessing to and the benediction on the marriage of Joseph and Mary. The Lord, His mother and His foster-father approach the land of Israel. When Joseph "heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee" (Matthew 2:22).

"Out of Egypt have I called My Son." The Call was not only from one place to another, but was also the Call to accomplish something; in this case, to fulfill the Law, to be the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, to give His Life for the world, to open Paradise and be the Door for all who believe in Him, and to welcome His Bride to the New Jerusalem at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb; that is, to bring His Church into heaven for all eternity.

In order to accomplish that, Jesus' Exodus must continue alone. At the age of twelve, Jesus must be about His Father's business and the Book is silent about Joseph. At the age of 30-something, Jesus takes leave of His mother. Jesus is baptized for you. His defeat of Satan in the wilderness temptation is for you. His perfect Life lived is for you. His perfect death died is for you. His Resurrection from the dead is for you. His Ascension into heaven is for you. Jesus, Who is with you always, now waits for you. He provides you with all that you need to bring you to Himself in Heaven ... water and the Word in Holy Baptism ... a servant of the Word in Holy Absolution ... His Flesh and Blood in the Holy Supper ... all that you might remain faithful unto death and be given the Crown of Life ... all that you might be given the Blood bought gifts of eternal life, salvation and to know that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and the (+) Son and the Holy Spirit.

My how Joseph's life changed! A carpenter who became a shepherd. A trip from Israel to Egypt and back. While Mary is blessed above all women in that she was the one chosen to bear the Savior Who is Christ the Lord, Joseph is blessed above all men in that he was the one called by God to be the shepherd of the Lamb. Thanks be to God. Amen.