

Matthew 2:13-23

Sermon

Hobart, January 8th, 2017

Launceston, January 15th, 2017

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Matthew 2:13-23, The Escape to Egypt

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¹⁴ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”*

¹⁶ Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. ¹⁷ Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A cry was heard in Ramah—
weeping and great mourning.
Rachel weeps for her children,
refusing to be comforted,
for they are dead.”*

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹ So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²² But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³ So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.” ¹

* **2:15** Hos 11:1.

* **2:18** Jer 31:15.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 2:13–23). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. CHRISTMAS

A. CHRISTMAS IS A WONDERFUL TIME FOR MOST PEOPLE

1. A time of family get-togethers and carols and images of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, angels and wise men
2. Theologian William Placher observes that people too often over sentimentalize the Christmas stories, focusing on the cuteness of Jesus as a new born baby, instead of the miracle and meaning of the Incarnation, God born as one of us.
3. But Placher emphasises that if we dig into the actual stories themselves, they are remarkably resistant to sentimentality.²
4. Our passage today is far from sentimental.
5. It is traumatic and violent, threatening and causing great upheaval and uncertainty in the lives of the new family
 - a) As Kathy Donley tells us;

This is the story of one family. It is also the story of many families. It is the story of a tyrant named Herod and every tyrant who before or since. It is a story about politics and power and fear, and also the story of love and courage.³

B. PRAYER

² William Carl Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), p.52

³ Kathy Donley, *When Jesus Was a Refugee*, Matthew 2:13-23, Emmanuel Baptist Church, January 3, 2016

BODY:

II. OUR PASSAGE IS IN MATTHEW 2:13-15

A. BUT FIRST LET US SEE WHERE THIS PART OF THE STORY FITS

B. MATTHEW 2:1-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking,
²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him.”

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities* of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you

who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’* ”

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

* **2:1** Or *royal astrologers*; Greek reads *magi*; also in 2:7, 16.

* **2:2** Or *star in the east*.

* **2:6a** Greek *the rulers*.

* **2:6b** Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2.

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. ⁴

1. This then leads into our passage for today

Matthew 2:13-15

¹³ After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”*

C. THERE IS A GREAT MIX OF ACTIVITY TAKING PLACE HERE

1. All at the same time we see the glory of God, signs in the heavens, the star, triumphant angels, joy, and worship
2. And a wicked and jealous ruler who plots to kill Jesus, and ends up murdering new born babies in a small rural village,
3. and Jesus, the Son of God born as a humble human baby being rushed away into exile by his parents in fear for their lives.
4. This is no idealized picture of life.
 - a) It includes the all too human attitudes of jealousy, striving for power and position, political plots and evil schemes
 - b) It includes the victimization of the innocent by those in power, their vulnerability and fears, loss of security, home and country.

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 2:1–12). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

* **2:15** Hos 11:1.

c) And so, it reflects on many of the harsh realities of our world and the general human condition since the beginning

III. "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON"

Matthew 2:13-15

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A. IRONY OF WHERE THEY ESCAPE TO

1. Why is this ironic?
2. Egypt is where Israel was held captive and the ruler (Pharaoh) sought to kill the first-born Israelite children
 - a) And God had to step in with power and might to loosen the grip of the Egyptians and release his people and bring them out to a new life of freedom and peace with him
3. Egypt is often used as a metaphor for sin, and the evils of corrupt human power and rulership
 - a) And yet that is where Jesus is taken for safety and where his early years are spent

B. ON THE OTHER HAND THERE IS ANOTHER PARALLEL REGARDING FLEEING INTO EGYPT THAT FITS MORE CLOSELY

1. This is where Joseph was taken as a captive, but where Jacob and the rest of the family ended up going to escape the famine of their home land

* 2:15 Hos 11:1.

2. For them too, Egypt was initially a place of safety that saved and preserved their lives
3. God doesn't do things as we expect
 - a) His ways are very different to our way
 - b) Particularly his way of dealing with evil, corruption, abuse and Godless tyranny
4. God's way of saving, rescuing and setting things right is displayed here at the very beginning of the Gospel message

C. IN THE FIRST EXODUS

1. God rescued his persecuted and suffering people by acts of great and glorious power
 - a) The Egyptians were afflicted and weakened so the Israelites could walk away free
 - b) The Red Sea miraculously opened to give them an exodus from Egypt into a new life with God in the wilderness and then the promised land
2. Jesus resisted Satan's temptation to solve the world's problems with power and glory before he began his ministry,
3. As the true King and Saviour, he chose the way of humbly sharing in our human suffering, rather than using God's power to destroy it
4. Instead of demanding worship and honour, he gave his very life for our salvation by being crucified by the civil and religious powers of this age

D. AND HERE, AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF HIS LIFE, GOD SAVES JESUS IN A COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED WAY

1. Instead of the way of the original Exodus, this time Jesus becomes a refugee
2. He and his family flee, as so many had done before and multiple times more have done since

E. THIS IS THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM THAT GOD WAS BRINGING IN JESUS, RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING

1. Not fighting force with force, violence with violence
2. This calling out of Egypt of God's Son, is the beginning, the pattern of how the full and successful kingdom of God will be brought about

^{15b} This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."* [Hosea 11:1]

F. HOSEA 11:

1. This is a quote from Hosea 11:1, but the whole chapter is most likely being referenced
 - a) For example Hosea 11:10-11

¹⁰ For someday the people will follow me.

I, the LORD, will roar like a lion.

And when I roar,

my people will return trembling from the west.

¹¹ Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt.

Trembling like doves, they will return from Assyria.

And I will bring them home again,"

says the LORD.

G. IT IS IN JESUS THAT WE ARE BROUGHT HOME AGAIN

1. And that starts with His Birth and his being brought out of Egypt as Jesus acts as one of us, and all of us, and brings us out of our Egypt's, at one with himself, the Father and the Spirit
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* 2:15 Hos 11:1.

IV. HEROD

Matthew 2:13-16

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A. HEROD

1. Recent National Geographic magazine posed the question, "Herod visionary or villain?"

a) As Tom Mueller tells us, Herod was not a true Jew

..his mother was an ethnic Arab, and his father was an Edomite, and though Herod was raised as a Jew, he lacked the social status of the powerful old families in Jerusalem who were eligible to serve as high priest, as the Hasmonaean kings had traditionally done.

Many of his subjects considered Herod an outsider—a "half Jew"...⁵

B. HE IS SYMBOLIC OF MANY POLITICIANS AND PEOPLE WITH POWER AND INFLUENCE

1. A mix of good and evil, brilliance and malice

a) He was certainly a powerful and influential ruler

b) He bartered with the Romans and negotiated difficult situations to end up having them make him King in Israel

c) He built many magnificent buildings and built the economy

* 2:15 Hos 11:1.

⁵ Tom Mueller, Herod, National Geographic, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/12/herod/mueller-text/1>

2. But his religious endeavours and rulership goals were not focused on God but on position and control and ego
3. In efforts to preserve power we read how he ruthlessly sought to eliminate this rumored Messiah, by trying to kill all the baby boys in the area of Bethlehem
 - a) He had his wife murdered in a twisted attempt to preserve his position, and later his mother-in-law and three of his own sons
4. He is very much of the type who devastates his own people for power and control, all in the name of doing what is best for the nation

C. HE WAS CALLED “AN ANTI-CHRIST” IN LATER CENTURIES

1. He was in so many ways the antithesis of Jesus, who was a pure and true Israelite
 - a) The true King of Israel, whom God sent to reign on David’s throne
 - b) To fulfil the prophecies of a new king, a new kingdom, a new High Priest and a new temple
 2. And as we know, in Jesus, God took a very different approach to conquering the enemies of his people, and ushering in his reign of righteousness and peace
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V. MATTHEW 2:16-18

¹⁶ Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance.

¹⁷ Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A cry was heard in Ramah—

weeping and great mourning.

Rachel weeps for her children,

refusing to be comforted,

for they are dead."*

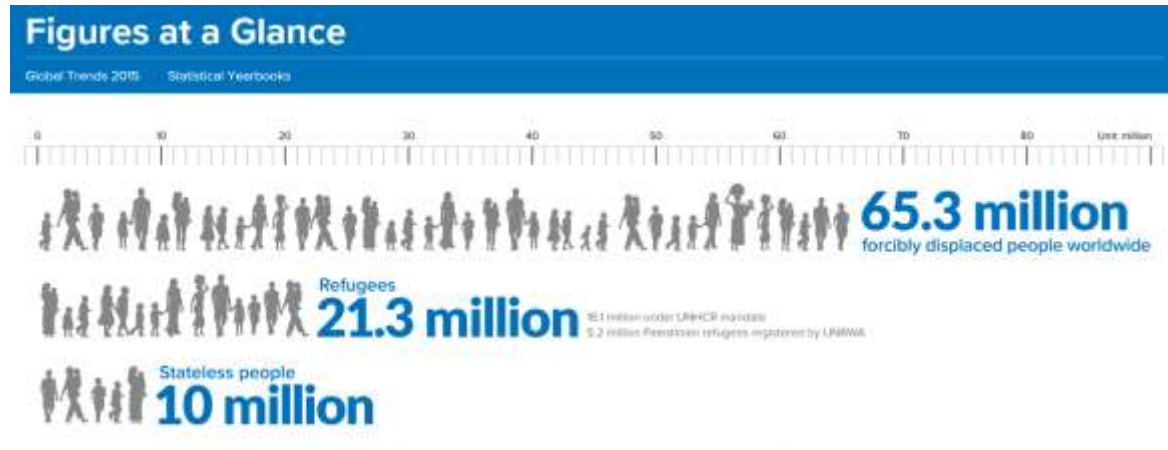
A. JUST LIKE THEM, AND TOO MANY PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD TODAY, JESUS AND HIS PARENTS WERE REFUGEES

1. In Jesus, God in the flesh, God lives and suffers alongside and in the place of the weak, the persecuted, the despised and decimated people of the world
2. He doesn't stand in pomp and authority and attack our problems from a distance with superior power and miraculous force
3. He flees evil with us, he suffers our persecution by the Herod's and Romans of this world.
4. He joins us in Egypt as refugees, in a foreign place that is far from our home and origins
5. This is definitely not Herod's way of bringing about the restoration of Israel
6. And just as the rest of the ways of the Kingdom that Jesus brought and taught us about is the reverse of our worldly kingdoms and lives, so is the way God "calls his Son out of Egypt"

* **2:18** Jer 31:15.

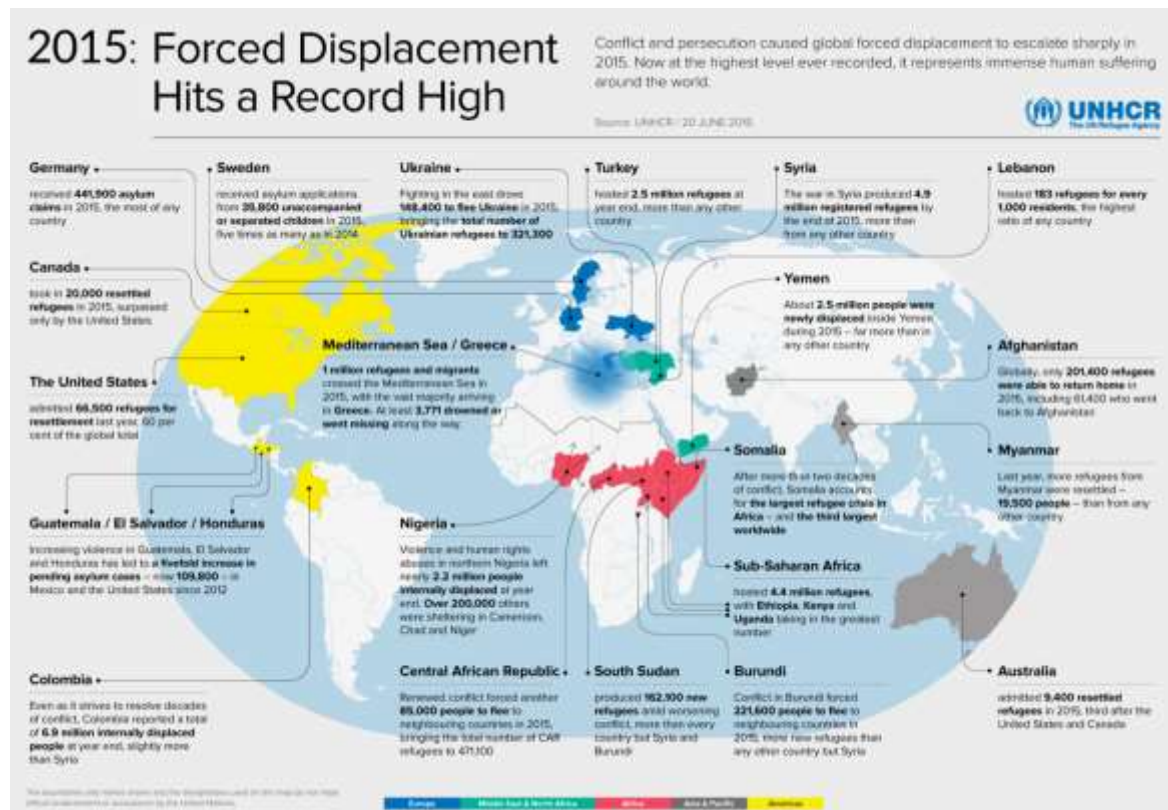
B. THERE ARE OVER 65 MILLION FORCIBLE DISPLACED PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD.

1. 15 years ago there were 12 million.



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2. World refugees locations



A. BECOMING A REFUGEE IS SOMETHING WAY BEYOND ANYTHING MOST OF US HAVE EXPERIENCED.

⁶ UNHCR, Figures at a glance, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html>

1. But it is something that Jesus, the Son of God, along with his family suffered through, right at the beginning of his human life
2. Warsan Shire, a refugee from Somalia, wrote about her experiences in her poem called "Home."

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body

you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck

feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

. . . .

i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i don't know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here⁷

**B. THIS IS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE TRAUMA AND PAIN OF
SO MANY WHO HAVE BEEN MISTREATED AND
DAMAGED BY UNJUST AND CONTROLLING POWERS
AND INDIVIDUALS**

1. And the whole of the message of the gospel addresses
these most challenging life issues and evils, starting
right here with Matthew 2

⁷ Warsan Shire, Home, <http://seekershshub.org/blog/2015/09/home-warsan-shire/>

2. And we see how in Jesus, God in human form—God with us, God one of us—begins to face and confront such matters
3. And we see that in Jesus, God deals with such violence and disorder very differently to the original Exodus, not by superior might and power, but by love
 - a) By joining us in our life and sufferings, and walking with us through them, and bringing us out safely on the other side, through his resurrection, the real Exodus
 - b) This is the new, the full and complete calling out of Egypt of all God's sons and daughters
 - c) The full and ultimate salvation God intended from the beginning

VI. MATTHEW 2:19-23

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

²¹ So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²² But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³ So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

A. SO JESUS, IS OUR EXODUS, THE PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION

1. Our God, our King, Messiah, High Priest, and the first born of the new people of God, the new Israel
2. Is called out of Egypt, brought into the land of Israel to grow up, and begin his ministry of bringing the good news of the new and better Kingdom
 - a) The Kingdom that is God's, that will finally conquer all the kingdoms of the world that cause injustice and misery

b) The Kingdom that is based on God himself, being one of us, one with us through all our ups and downs

c) Being one with us, and bringing us all to be one with him, and with one another, and all of creation

3. The author of Hebrews reminds us of this

Hebrews 2:14-18

¹⁴ Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had* the power of death. ¹⁵ Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

¹⁶ We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham.

¹⁷ Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters,* so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.

¹⁸ Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

* **2:14** Or *has*.

* **2:17** Greek *like the brothers*.

CONCLUSION:

B. SO THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS NOT JUST A CUTE, SENTIMENTAL TALE ABOUT A BABY IN A MANGER

1. It addresses the deep issues of our broken world

- a) It shows that God is not disinterested or uninvolved with the tragedies and shattered lives and injustices of human existence

2. As Joy Carroll Wallis explains;

Jesus enters a world of real pain, of serious dysfunction, a world of brokenness and political oppression. Jesus was born an outcast, a homeless person, a refugee, and finally he becomes a victim to the powers that be. Jesus is the perfect savior for outcasts, refugees, and nobodies. That's how the church is described in scripture time and time again – not as the best and the brightest – but those who in their weakness become a sign for the world of the wisdom and power of God.”⁸

C. PRAYER

⁸ <http://liturgy.co.nz/church-year/herod-christmas>