

Christmas Eve Service

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] him as her own son. So then Moses escapes the Egyptian king's infanticide by leaving his fellow Jews and living among the Egyptians. And similarly here, Jesus escapes King Herod's infanticide by leaving his fellow Jews and he spends his infancy in Egypt. Matthew is drawing these parallels so we can see what Jesus was meant to be, who he was meant to be, what he was meant to do.

After Moses grows up and becomes a man, he incurs Pharaoh's displeasure and the king tries to kill him again. And so Moses this time flees to Midian and then in Exodus 4, 19, the Lord God appears to Moses and tells him this, go back to Egypt for all the men who are seeking your life are dead.

And Matthew makes an intentional connection to that verse as well in verse 20. If you look with me, Matthew chapter 2 verse 20, when the angel of the Lord appears in a dream to Joseph after Herod's death, he says something very similar, rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who sought the child's life are dead. Just as Moses returned to God's people in order to lead them out of their captivity in Egypt, now Jesus returns to God's people in order to lead them out of their captivity and slavery to sin. When Moses was leading God's people out of slavery in Egypt, it was the final plague that finally made Pharaoh give up and to surrender. And the final plague involved every firstborn son and every firstborn male animal being struck dead by the angel of death.

This was a fitting punishment for the Egyptians because in Exodus 4, 22, God calls Israel, his nation, my firstborn son. So when Pharaoh refuses to let God's people, his firstborn son go, it is their firstborn son who are struck. And the firstborn males, however, among the Israelites were spared because God's people had followed his instructions to kill an unblemished lamb and then to daub its blood on the doors so that when the angel of death was going by the town, the people with the blood of the lamb on the door would be spared. So the lamb died as the substitute.

The blood of the lamb covered the people of God and that is how they were able to survive the plague. And because of that event to commemorate it in Exodus 13, God ordained, he ordered that every firstborn male animal be sacrificed and also that every firstborn son be redeemed by paying a certain price of redemption price. And this sacrifice of the Passover lamb and these ransom prices that they paid each for each male firstborn male, they foreshadowed the coming of Jesus because according to John one 29, Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And first Corinthians 5, 7 says, Christ is our Passover lamb who has been sacrificed. So Jesus is the lamb that the original Passover lamb was meant to point to. Jesus is the one whose death and whose shed blood now covers our sin and protects us and gives us eternal life. And that's why Jesus describes his mission this way in

[3 : 29] Mark 10 45 that he has come to give his life as a ransom for many. So Jesus is the price to redeem the slaves from their slavery for our freedom. Every human being is born into slavery to sin. Every single one of us once served a cruel master. Sin promises joy and fulfillment without God. Sin makes us its obedient slaves and therefore disobedient rebels to God. Sin lies to us that it can provide us with full and happy life that we dream of when in reality it kills us. When only Jesus can offer us abundant life and pleasures forevermore as Psalm 1611 says, but on our own, we could never escape sin's grasp. Sin enslaves people and the law of sin and death, the rule of sin applies to every country, every land and every city on earth.

If you're a slave, you can, you can try to run for your freedom, but then you'd have to get to a place where there are no slaves where there are no slaves where you won't be considered a slave. Because if you're found in a place where the law is in place and you're still a slave, you'll be reduced back into your slavery no matter where you go. For us, there is no escape from sin's grasp. Everyone is a slave to sin. Everywhere you turn, every place on earth, the law of sin and death applies.

So sin brings people crashing back to the reality of their enslavement. And we have no choice in the matter. That's what it means to be a slave. People can't help but sin. They can't help but live for themselves. They have no choice. They can't help but defy God. They're sinners. But thanks be to God, says Romans 6, 17, that you, it's speaking of Christians here, you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness. And it says in Romans 8, 2, that for this law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Jesus is the new Moses that releases us from our slavery to sin. The cross of Christ is our emancipation proclamation because Jesus died for our sins in our place. And because he was raised from the dead, the law of sin and death no longer applies to those who have pledged allegiance to this new king Jesus. So we serve a new master, a new Lord, a merciful King under the new law of the spirit of life. So Jesus is the new Moses, but he's also the new Israel. He's the deliverer of Israel, but he also represents the delivered Israel itself, the people of God. In verse 15, Matthew said that Jesus' sojourn in Egypt occurred to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt,

I called my son. Matthew is there citing from Hosea 11, 1, where God recalls the time he led Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus. He calls him his son there. And that verse prophetically anticipated that Jesus, the divine son of God in human flesh would also be called out of Egypt.

So Jesus was in Egypt for a time, but he was called out of Egypt. But there's more than that. As I mentioned earlier, God refers to Israel as his firstborn son. And so Jesus is not only the new Moses who delivers them out of their slavery. He's the new Israel that represents them and he delivers them by doing in their place what they could not do for themselves. I'll explain this further. Look at verses 16 to 18 with me. It says, then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem. And in all that region who are two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children. She refused to be comforted because they are no more. Herod had instructed, if you're with us earlier in the Advent series, Herod had instructed the wise men to inform him when they find the baby king that was born, the king of the Jews, so that he too might go and pay homage to him.

[8 : 18] But in reality, he was plotting murder to try to kill Jesus so that he wouldn't have a threat to his own throne. So Herod tried to trick the wise men, but ironically, Herod is the one that's tricked by the wise men here because with God's guidance, the wise men do not go back to Herod, but go by another way to their own home. And so Herod is infuriated and he orders the massacre of the innocents. Earlier in verse seven, Herod had secretly asked the wise men exactly when the star announcing the birth of the king of the Jews had appeared. So that question was asked because he was trying to figure out how old the baby is. Because if he knows how old approximately the baby is, then he could try to kill all babies around that age, male child, children that age to reduce risk. So Herod deduces that as long as he kills all the males in and around Bethlehem under the age of two, then he'd be safe. He'd be killing off the full range. And Nazareth at the beginning of the first century was estimated to have around 500 residents. No one knows for sure, but that's an estimate.

And so that means, you know, it probably included at least scores of infants and toddlers that were killed. That seems extraordinarily cruel, but for Herod, this was the norm and not the exception.

First century Roman Jewish historian, uh, Josephus records that I think that's a toy. Uh, Josephus records that Herod, uh, ruthlessly eliminated all members of the Hasmonean Royal family, which were, which was a rival family. He also killed in cold blood, his brother-in-law, his mother-in-law and his favorite wife, Miriam. And his, and that's not enough. He also kills his three eldest sons on suspicion that they were plotting a takeover. So if Herod is kind of a man that can kill members of his own household off on suspicions alone, then he wouldn't have batted an eye in killing off children in a small village to whom he had no relation. If that meant killing a potential rival claimant to his throne. And so the quote in verse 18 is from Jeremiah 31 15, and it speaks of Rachel, the wife of Jacob weeping and mourning her, the loss of her sons. Her sons made up the 12 tribes of Israel. So she's weeping for her children's figurative because Rachel was long gone by this time. And in the context of Jeremiah, the weeping is in reference to Israel's Babylonian exile when Israel was defeated and we're being sent, being shipped to Babylon as exiles. And so Rachel's weeping here because they are no more. They are in exile. They've been defeated. But interestingly, in that same passage in Jeremiah 31 verses 16 to 17, the Lord God himself tells Rachel to stop weeping because he will bring back her children from exile and restore them to their own country.

And then in verses 31 to 34, he promises to make a new covenant with them in the place of the old covenant that Israel had broken. This time God will write his law on his people's hearts so that he might be their God and they shall be his people so that they might truly know the Lord and he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. So that's the promise that Jeremiah is prophesied of. And that's the prophecy that now Matthew is referring back to when he quotes that verse about Rachel's weeping.

Even though right now, Herod's murder of all the male children under two in Bethlehem was a cause for weeping. The fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 awaits the promise that the exiles will return. The promise that God will make a new covenant with his people and that he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more because the sin, their sin and their iniquity was the reason for their defeat and the reason for their exile. So God provides the solution for their sins in Jesus.

[12 : 27] Apart from Jesus, we are perpetual exiles without a home. God is holy and just. He cannot condone sin. Habakkuk 1.13 says that God is a purer eyes than to see evil. He can't stand evil. He can't stand sin.

So sinners must be punished. And as sinners, every single one of us is a sinner. We deserve to be separated from God forever. That's exile. To be separated from him. But God, by sending his son, Jesus, he made a way for us to be reconciled to him, restored to him again, because Jesus paid the price, the penalty for our sins, our wicked sins, our prideful sins, our selfish sins, the sins we committed out in the open, the sins we committed in secret, all are forgiven and no longer counted against those who have put their faith in Jesus alone for salvation.

And when we put our faith in Jesus, we are born again by the spirit of God and have the law of God written on our hearts. That's how Jesus, as the son of God, saves us from our slavery and exile.

And so finally, we see in verses 19 to 23, in addition to being the new Moses and the new Israel, that Jesus is the new David who inaugurates the kingdom of God. Please follow along with me as I read verses 19 to 23. It says, but when Herod died, 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. And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of the father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. This is an interesting fulfillment. Jesus has survived and Herod, who sought to kill him, has not. And so Joseph is instructed by God in a dream to return to the land of Israel. But after their return, they learned that Herod's son, Archelaus, was reigning over

Judea, which their own original home was part of. After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons. Judea and Samaria, which includes Jerusalem and Bethlehem, was under Archelaus.

[15 : 07] And Galilee, which includes Nazareth, was under the control of Herod Antipas. First century Jewish Roman historian Josephus that I quoted earlier notes that Archelaus began his reign over his kingdom by massacring 3,000 Passover celebrants. Okay, 3,000 Jews celebrating the Passover. So he appears to have taken after his father. And in 6 AD, a delegation was sent to Rome from Judea and Samaria to denounce Archelaus for his cruelty and tyranny. And eventually, even Rome couldn't stand him and they deposed him. And so Archelaus had a terrible reputation. So when Joseph learns that Archelaus is reigning in his area, he doesn't want anything to be, anything to do with him. And so he is, after being confirmed by the dream that God sent him, warning him about him, he withdraws to the district of Galilee to live in a city called Nazareth. And in doing that, it fulfilled another prophecy.

It says, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he will be called a Nazarene. Jesus, as the messianic king in the line of King David, was born in Bethlehem, as was prophesied in Micah 5, 2. But he will grow up in Nazareth. He will be called a Nazarene. But this fulfillment is a little bit different from other fulfillments of prophecy that we've seen so far in Matthew, because there's no quotation here, no citation of actual scripture. Instead of saying, referring to a single prophet, here he refers to what was spoken by the prophets in the plural to indicate that more than one prophet has spoken of Jesus being a Nazarene. But that's curious because the city of Nazareth is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. Most likely what Matthew is referring to is the prophecy that Messiah would be known as the branch of David. The name Nazareth comes from the Hebrew word netzer, which means the branch. It means, or it could be translated an offshoot, a sprout, or a root.

And so Isaiah 11, 1 to 2 uses that word, that exact word to prophesy of the coming Messiah. It says, there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. And then there are many other scriptures that speak of Jesus being the branch, even though he might use synonyms for the word, not exactly the same word.

So Isaiah 53, 2 prophesies that the Messiah will grow up like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He would appear out of nowhere, which is fitting because Nazareth is a town in the middle of nowhere. And this is particularly appropriate since Nazareth was a, like, of Nazareth, Nathaniel says in John 1, 46, can anything good come out of Nazareth? No one expected the Messiah to grow up in Nazareth.

He was like a root coming out of dry ground. Jeremiah 23, 5 says, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. Zechariah 6, 12, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, the man whose name is the branch, he shall be called Nazarene, right? For he shall branch out from his place and he shall build a temple of the Lord.

[18 : 41] And even in the New Testament, after he's fulfilled these prophecies, Jesus says of himself in Revelation 22, verse 16, I am the root and the descendant of David. Jesus is the prophesied messianic king descended from David. And the good news of Christmas is that the new David ushers in the kingdom of God.

And he lets us, those who follow Jesus, be a part of it. My family, we didn't get a usual Christmas tree this year. We actually bought a live fir tree this year. And it's a small tree right now because small trees are cheaper. And every year we expect to grow six inches or so, and it'll grow up with the kids. And hopefully by the time they're adults, it'll be too big for our house and we'll have to plant it in somebody's yard, whoever has a yard in our church. And I mentioned that because as I was shopping for it on this website, they sold some fir trees that are specially grafted on firma, they called it. And those were more expensive. I looked in to see why. And these were fir trees that were grafted onto the rootstock of the plant, A.B.S. firma, which is a particularly hardy fir tree, resistant to disease and tolerant of warm and humid conditions. And so fir trees that are grafted onto the rootstock of this firma, A.B.S. firma, are more likely to survive, less likely to be ravaged by disease, and more resilient against heat.

As sinners, by our very nature, we are prone to sin. We are like this disease-prone branches of a tree that are susceptible to pests and vulnerable to heat. We cannot survive on our own.

We are destined for the furnace. But God has sent Jesus the branch, the root of David. And Paul writes in Romans 11 that those who put their faith in Jesus are grafted in to share in the nourishing of the root of this olive tree that is Jesus. It is only by being united with Jesus, by being grafted onto him, that we can be nourished by the Spirit of God and we can bear the fruit that is in keeping with salvation, with repentance and faith in Jesus. We can't make it on our own. We can't save ourselves.

And you cannot be grafted onto Jesus while being rooted in your sinful ways. You cannot be grafted onto Jesus while following other gods. Jesus said in John 14 verse 6, I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me. No other religious teacher can lead us there and there is no other Messiah. But the good news that I get to declare to you this evening for Christmas is that Jesus has come. The branch of David has come. And if you repent of your sins and if you put your faith in him, you can be united with him. You can become part of the people of God, the branch, the vine, the olive tree of God, and flourish with him for all eternity.

[22 : 26] That's my prayer for you. And I hope that if you don't know Jesus, that you'll talk to some of us, talk to me, that you'll give your life to him. He's the king we worship. He's our savior.

He's worthy of our lives. Let me pray for us now. God, we thank you that when we had no way, you made a way for us by sending Jesus.

Lord, we are like that diseased branch attacked by pests, sick and withering.

There's no hope for us sinners without you. We thank you for sending Jesus, son of God, as a baby 2,000 years ago.

We pray that you would fill us with renewed wonder at the work you have done in Christ Jesus and through Christ Jesus that we might abound with joy and thanksgiving.

[23 : 54] Through all the busyness and distractions of the holiday season, we pray this evening that you would quiet our hearts to remember the reason for it all.

It's in his precious name we pray. Amen.