

Matthew 2:13-23

Happy New Year! And happy 8th day of Christmas!

Have you ever noticed what an abrupt shift we make liturgically and scripturally right after Christmas Day? We move from the hope of Advent to the celebration and revelry of Christmas Eve and morning right into Dec. 26th –the stoning of the first Christian martyr- St. Stephen’s Day and then on Dec. 28th – the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents and then today’s reading for the second Sunday of Christmas about the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt in order to escape the killing of baby Jesus. Whoa. What was the Church thinking with this calendar? And I don’t know about you, but I much prefer to remain in the glee and afterglow of the most wonderful time of the year and take in the joy of the 12 Days of Christmas with some more eggnog and Christmas carols by the fireplace. But here we are – staring down these passages full of suffering and danger- and we do it every year during Christmastide right around New Year’s. So what can we make of it?

You’ll notice that this passage in Matthew’s Gospel gives us an insight into the dangers that Jesus faced immediately from the time of his birth...and we know it didn’t get easier as time went on. We know that King Herod had ordered the slaughter of all baby boys under age two in that region in an attempt to kill the Christ Child who he saw as a threat to his throne. Matthew, in his Gospel, is linking Jesus with the people of Israel in this passage – and the similarities of baby Jesus to baby Moses are hard to ignore...both of them are bearers of covenants from God. Both of them had to escape as babies from a power-hungry tyrant who had commanded the slaughter of infants. Moses was saved when he was taken in by Pharaoh’s own daughter in Egypt. Jesus is saved when he is taken into Egypt by his parents. Jesus, Mary and Joseph become refugees and then, as the prophet Hosea described centuries earlier, God calls God’s people – God’s son, “out of Egypt.” And

both Jesus and Moses are saved as they leave Egypt for the sake of the salvation of God’s people.

During this Christmas holiday, my family’s life has felt a bit like the liturgical progression we’re in now – jumping from the joy of Christmas to absolute mayhem in just a matter of days. This past Sunday on December 25th we had a wonderful Christmas celebration at my dad’s home in the El Cajon/Bostonia area with my sisters and brothers and cousins and aunts and uncles and my niece and nephews. We had a fun and joyful time opening presents, playing games, exchanging white elephant gifts, and eating our big Christmas dinner together with way too many pies to choose from. Everything seemed right with the world. And then on December 27th that peace was disrupted abruptly when a Learjet came crashing down just yards from my dad’s house. My kids and I weren’t there but the rest of our visiting family was there at the time – and the jet flew overhead just feet above their house and the explosion was so close that it shook the house and the sound was deafening. In an instant they were surrounded by darkness as first the power went out and then the bright orange light of explosion, and then blazing fire, jet fuel, plane wreckage and the sound of neighbors yelling in fear. Soon that was accompanied by the sounds of sirens and emergency response crews. Thank God they were not injured, but they were shaken to their core by this traumatic event...particularly the kids.

When I went to my dad’s house the next day and saw the crews investigating and still cleaning the crash site, I simply could not believe how close the plane had been to my family. Even though no one was injured on the ground, we know all four passengers on the jet died instantaneously: and may God bless their souls. But the realization that half of my family could have been wiped out in an instant had the plane hit the ground just some yards to the south – that they were that close to death – really sank in for me. I was filled with a

sense of the fragility and vulnerability of life in a way I hadn't quite felt before – that realization that we simply never know what the next day or moment can and will hold for us. That there are no guarantees of a tomorrow. It made me wonder: why do I always assume there will be a tomorrow and take today for granted?

We do live in a dangerous world. We live in a fallen world according to the Bible. And so, we can expect suffering and death as part of our existence. This is scriptural. And the story from Matthew's Gospel today reminds us that in this dangerous world – even our Lord and Savior Jesus was born into real danger and suffering.

The event of the jet crash last Monday will never be forgotten by my family. Strangely, it is not the first time that members of my family have narrowly avoided a disaster like this. In fact, when my mother was 9 months pregnant with me my parents and grandmother had parked and approached and then decided not to go inside an ice cream parlor near the Sacramento Air Force Base. Just minutes after that decision to leave, a jet crashed and exploded inside it killing or injuring everyone. Our family has always felt that we narrowly escaped that calamity by the grace of God.

But let's be clear: that is not to say that God's grace is only in effect when we escape danger...God is also with us when we must walk through the valley of the shadow of death and into death itself. People still died in the airplane in El Cajon last Monday. People still died at the Farrell's Ice Cream in Sacramento those decades ago. And people still died when Herod ordered the slaughter of the innocents 2000 years ago. Yes, God did save and protect our family and other families during these events. And God certainly protected Jesus and his family. But Jesus was crucified later. And so, the more important lesson that we can take from this Gospel story is that God is with us and that our lives – each of our lives- are in God's hands. Our

time here is temporary. We will all die – and when we do – it will be in God's time. But until then – God is with us. God will help us. We are never alone. We do not face the challenges and dangers of this life without God's help.

Like Jesus and the holy family- God leads us and directs our paths according to God's will when we trust God to do so. When we put our lives in God's hands and surrender our will and our plans to God's will and God's plans – God will lead the way. As you enter 2022: Know that you are not alone. Your life is in God's hands. God loves you and has proven that love by sending his Son Jesus into the world.

We do not need the world to be comfortable or safe in order to have faith and trust in God – we need to have faith and trust in God because the world is uncomfortable and unsafe. This is the essence of our faith – it is the faith we can take with us into this new year. Immanuel – God is with us and we are God's. Thanks be to God.