

The Second Sunday after the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord

St. Matthew 2:13-23

January 4th, 2026

Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC

Simpsonville, SC

Pastor Jerald P. Dulas

Out of Egypt Did I Call My Son

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And he arose and took the young Child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt did I call my son.’”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord God, heavenly Father, Who didst suffer Thy dear Son, + Jesus Christ, to become a stranger and a sojourner in Egypt for our sakes, and didst lead Him safely home to His fatherland: Mercifully grant that we poor sinners, who are strangers and sojourners in this perilous world, may soon be called home to our true fatherland, the Kingdom of Heaven, where we shall live in eternal joy and glory; through the merits of Thy Son, + Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, every great meal, every great feast will include a variety of flavors—not just sweet, but also sour or bitter or salty. Think of a turkey with jellied cranberries, and dressing. Or sweet and sour sauce. Sweets all alone do not make much of a feast, at least in a meal that has any substance. It needs salt and bitter and sour, too. Christmas is no exception to this rule. The feast of Christmas is, in all its fullness, a bitter-sweet mixture of sorrow and joy, birth and death, fear and faith. We know the sweet parts—the cute and cuddly Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. The angels announcing His birth. The adoring shepherds. The mysterious Magi worshipping the Child and opening costly treasures. How sweet the Christmas story is! The Lord and Creator of the universe comes as a tiny, helpless little Baby, the second Adam born to save the human race. Like candy canes and hot chocolate, we enjoy its sweetness. And we should enjoy it because sweets are meant to be enjoyed, and enjoyed without the burden of guilt.

But our Lord God has put more than sweet receptors on our tongues. There are also salt and sour and bitter receptors. In fact, about one third of the population has salt receptors that are somehow crossed up with their sweet receptors, and they can taste sweet, better when salt is added. That would include all of those who salt their watermelon and think that it tastes good. Our Lord God has rigged our bodies to live on more than just sweets alone. In fact, a diet of sweets alone will eventually kill you. And a diet of Christmas sugar without its necessary bitterness and saltiness becomes spiritual candy instead of solid food, dessert instead of a feast, with not much staying power to hold you through another year, let alone to Good Friday and Easter. And so, on this Eleventh day of Christmas, we have a sour and bitter dish to go with our Christmas sweets.

Christmas is probably the shortest and bloodiest season of the whole Church’s year. One would

not think it, but it is. Christmas starts with the birth of our Lord + Jesus, and the blood that naturally comes with a birth. Then on December 26th there is the Festival of St. Stephen, a martyr, where the Church observes the stoning of St. Stephen. Two days later comes December 28th and the festival of the Holy Innocents, remembering those little baby boys of Bethlehem who died at the hands of King Herod. Three days ago, we celebrated the circumcision of our Lord + Jesus, the day when first was poured our Lord's blood as a sacrifice for us. Today, we also hear about the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem, which is also included in the readings for this Second Sunday after Christmas. We hear Rachel weeping for her children, because they are not.

It is hardly the stuff of a holly, jolly Christmas. A slaughter of little baby boys, two years old and younger, by a jealous King. Now, granted, it was probably not many, given the size of Bethlehem and the surrounding region at the time, but even one is too many. And though we would rather gloss over this terrible episode, it is frightfully important stuff. As St. Matthew reminds us of three times in today's Gospel reading, these things happened to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets. In other words, these events were set in motion long before they happened. They are not little accidents, little meaningless happenings. These things happened to fulfill the words of the prophets, to fill them up with their ultimate meaning.

That St. Joseph had to hurry the Baby + Jesus, and His mother, out of the country and seek safety in Egypt, of all places, was no accident. "Out of Egypt did I call my Son," the prophet Hosea said. This little Baby born to the Blessed Virgin Mary is the embodiment of Israel; He is literally a one-man Israel, seeking shelter in Egypt. Just as the sons of Jacob once did. Just as Abram and Sarai, and Lot did. And then they would all eventually return to Israel. Our Lord lives out in His own flesh the pattern of exile and return, of death and resurrection. This is what our Lord + Jesus is all about. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

That King Herod, in rage and jealousy, kills all the baby boys in the vicinity of Bethlehem two years and under is no accident. It is a political atrocity, indeed, but no accident. Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, the grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh, was long accustomed to weeping for her children. She wept when they were killed or carried off into exile. And now Rachel weeps again for little children killed by the sword. In their deaths they are "martyrs," they bear witness to the death of God's Son, the innocent One Who gave His life as a ransom for us all. One might say that the little ones died that day for no other reason than that they resembled the Baby + Jesus—baby boys two years old and under. Remember them well! The double-edged sword of politics and false religion will always swing against those who resemble Christ in His humility.

We call these baby boys of Bethlehem the "holy innocents," not because they were holy or innocent on their own or by the tragic way they died, but because they were in death gathered into the one Death that conquers death, the death of Bethlehem's baby Boy named + Jesus. They were sinners, all of them, right down to the tiniest infant, as all children are conceived and born in sin. Just as we all are. They were circumcised under the Law, baptized (in an Old Testament sense) into the death of the Lamb named + Jesus. They were holy in the Lord + Jesus' holiness, innocent in His innocence. Their deaths, tragic and painful as they were, are precious in God's sight, as is the death of all God's children in the death of His Child + Jesus.

That St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary eventually settled in Nazareth up in Galilee also fulfills the word of the prophets. "He should be called a Nazarene." The Son of God born in Bethlehem grows up in no-name Nazareth, a backwater joint that never produced anything good, literally as far from power and glory and religion and politics as one could get. Or as the old saying went, that one of His Apostles quoted, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" and the answer had been a definite "not a chance in the world."

All of these things together show us how God works—hiddenly, subversively, under a hasty flight to Egypt and Rachel's tears at funerals for little ones and no-name Nazareth up in Galilee. It also tells us that God works good out of all things, whether it be a hasty flight to Egypt, Bethlehem's babies, or Nazareth. All of these things are woven in a wonderful tapestry called our salvation and life in the Lord + Jesus. From our perspective, we see the backside of the tapestry—all knotted and ugly, loose ends, dangling threads, things that make no sense. And that is how salvation looks from this side of things; from this side of eternity. It is a whole bunch of loose ends and dangling threads that do not seem to make any sense, and that should not happen, if we were running the universe.

And these things also remind us that our Lord God does not stick His hand out and fix things every time something bad happens. He could, and He occasionally does, but not ordinarily. The Lord God is not much into intervention, at least the way we picture intervention. Instead, He is content to let things pretty much be with things as they are. He is the Lord God of the wheat field filled with tares, Who even now allows the tares to keep growing among the wheat. He is the Lord God of the parable of the dragnet that hauls all sorts of fish to the shore to be sorted out at the Last Judgment. He is the Lord God Who kept company with sinners, Who came to seek and to save the entire lost human race and draw all to Himself in His death, and Who said "It is finished" in His death once and for all.

Our Lord God could have stopped old King Herod. But the Lord God did not do that. He just let King Herod be until he died on his own. And the only intervention was another a dream St. Joseph had, telling him to take St. Mary and the Boy and flee into Egypt until it was safe to return.

Our Lord God could have chosen a respectable place for His Son to grow up. Every parent wants the best for his child, right? But backwoods, no-name Nazareth is the neighborhood of choice for the Lord God's Messiah, growing up among the sawdust and shavings of a carpenter's shop, playing with St. Joseph's saws and planes. The Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Word made flesh, Who is the Maker and Creator of Heaven and Earth, and holds us in His being, grows up in Nazareth until His hour comes.

And after having said all that, I am beginning to rethink that image that I put before you, of God stitching a beautiful tapestry and our seeing only the backside of its glory: the knots and dangling ends which are hardly the picture of beauty. Maybe that image is wrong, or at least, not quite accurate. Maybe, instead of Lord God as the Master Stitcher at work on a great cosmic tapestry, we ought to picture our Lord God as the string collector, making a huge ball of string out of all the loose, tangled, messed up, discarded bits and pieces of our lives. See, when one makes a tapestry, he is very selective about the quality of thread that he weaves into his work. Only the finest will do justice to the work. But in a ball of string, any bit will do, provided that it is joined to the bundle and tied to the rest.

And in that ball of string, an old shoelace can be tied to a gold thread, and each has its meaning. The shoelace does not have to become gold thread, and the gold thread does not have to become a shoelace. They both belong to the big ball of string.

And that, my dear friends, is the image I would like to leave you all with on this eleventh and savory day of Christmas, as we think about the holy family's flight into Egypt, and the horrible death of Bethlehem's baby boys, and the nowhere place called Nazareth that our Lord + Jesus called His home. Think of the Lord God as the collector of loose ends, making the biggest ball of loose ends there ever was and tying them all together in the death of our Lord + Jesus. For us, that means nothing in our lives is thrown away forever—it is all redeemed, forgiven, restored, renewed, and resurrected in the Lord + Jesus. There is no erasing the video tape, no denials, no matter how painful or embarrassing. The Lord God makes good out of the worst we do and the worst that is done to us, reconciling it all in the death of our Lord + Jesus. Every last seemingly minor or meaningless detail is under His lordship, His control.

Collectively, it means that the whole messed up ball of this world is reconciled to the Lord God in the death of the Lord + Jesus and there are no loose ends with Him. Every sinner has been died for, every sin atoned for, forgiven. Every life, and every death, has meaning only in the life and death of the Lord + Jesus. It finds its meaning and its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of the Son of God, Who embraced the world in His death on a Friday that we call "good." Out of the bitterness of Rachel's tears, look again at the Lord God's Child, mangered and given for you in Holy Baptism, in the pure preaching of the Word of the Lord God, and in the Holy Supper of His Body and Blood given in bread and wine. How sweet the gift of salvation in our Lord + Jesus is! It is sweet treat amidst the bitterness of this evil world. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ + Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!