

The Incarnation Teaches Us To Trust In God

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[0 : 00] Well, I think that might have been the closest to perfect harmony that we're going to get with that absolutely classic song.

Knowing that the children are going to remain with us, I have a shorter sermon. So instead of 50 minutes, it's going to be 40.

That's all right. We should only be about 10 minutes, which is a small miracle for any preacher.

But what I would like to do is, we've been looking in a bit of Luke and Matthew at the Nativity account, and this morning I want to just focus on just a couple of verses from Matthew.

Matthew 2, just after the Magi come to the house of Joseph and Mary. And so Matthew chapter 2, verse 13 to 15, that's all.

[1 : 12] And all I really want to focus on is how the incarnation shows us how to trust God.

The incarnation itself shows us how to trust God. And so let me read from Matthew chapter 2. Matthew chapter 2, verse 13.

Now when they had departed, yesterday. Verse 14. Aaron said, 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 until 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 I called my son. And that is from Hosea 11.1. Now, this is the word of the Lord, and we pray that he blesses the reading of it. So, just a short portion, but probably occupies quite a duration in their experience when they had to get up in the middle of the night. And again, you know, as Joseph might have been thinking, this doesn't make any sense. And maybe Mary thought, why are you waking us up in the middle of the night? Why are we going to

Egypt, of all places? This doesn't make any sense. But regardless of this, I wanted to ask a question, who's the most vulnerable character in this story? Jesus, because he is, what, under two years old?

He's just an infant. He's a toddler. He's just a toddler. I remember the nerves when Jen was pregnant, if you've ever gone through a pregnancy. I remember the nerves, because there's a lot of vulnerabilities during pregnancy. There's a lot that can go wrong. What if the child doesn't even survive pregnancy? So many things can go wrong. And Levi, particularly, he had a traumatic birth.

[3 : 48] I'm sure many of you at some point have experienced someone who has had a traumatic birth, maybe yourself. And so, is the child going to even survive birth? And then I remember particularly the first six months of a newborn life, you know, sterilizing bottles, going to all sorts of length, because newborn children are vulnerable to all sorts of infection as well, you know. And this is in our modern world with sterilized equipment. Imagine what it was like in a place where animals feed.

And so, there's all these vulnerabilities, and there's all these potential dangers to this baby in the story. Now, why did they flee to Egypt? Well, Herod wanted to destroy the baby. That's what the angel said. Herod's going to search for this child because he wants to destroy this baby. And we heard a little bit about that from Bill. Not just any Herod. Herod the Great. And if you don't know anything about Herod the Great, he was called Herod the Great because of some of his great successes.

He rebuilt the temple. He did a lot of architectural builds, building projects. But he also murdered his own sons. His own sons. And so, you know that you need to take serious this threat against this baby.

On top of all the other risks to a newborn baby, you've got Herod the Great, who's wanting to search for him to destroy him. And if a king wants to do that, who's going to stop him? Who's going to stop the king? So, on top of all these dangers, you've got this. And so, they flee to Egypt, of all places, to the land that once enslaved Israel. As Bill said a couple of weeks ago, Egypt was now a safer place for Israel's Messiah than Israel. Unbelievable. But what I want to focus on this morning is something more significant than the fact that Egypt's a safer place. I want to focus on what Matthew highlights in verse 15. If you've got a Bible there, look at verse 15. Verse 15, Matthew says that there is an alternative reason for God sending them to Egypt. It says, this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, out of Egypt I have called my son. And so, Matthew offers this alternative explanation as to why they're going to Egypt. It's not just because of this threat from this king. Really, it's to fulfill something. And so, they're going to Egypt, of all places. And going to Egypt, what have we learned in Egypt? What have the Israelites learned in Egypt? I mean, I don't know if you think about your country, where you come from, and think about the great event that defines your country. I don't know what it would be in Scotland. What do you think it would be in Scotland?

Sorry? Barakburn, Lockerbie, Braveheart, you know, all of these different things, you know. But there's something defining, you know, it might be John Knox and the Reformation. In Israel's history, the defining thing was the Exodus. And if we learned anything, we've been spending much of this year throughout the book of Exodus learning about the absolute power and sovereignty of God.

[7 : 15] So, when Israel think about Egypt, what should come to mind is the absolute power and sovereignty of God that whatever God has planned cannot be stopped, not even by so great a king as Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And so, what is the signal? Go to Egypt. Go to Egypt. Oh, well, what happened in Egypt? What are we supposed to learn? What is God trying to get us to learn about sending us to Egypt?

Joseph and Mary thinking, well, what happened last time Israel was in Egypt? We found out that God was absolutely sovereign and powerful, and that nothing can stop His plan. And so, I don't know about you.

Have you ever had to look after something that's precious or vulnerable? Thank you very much. We're going to sing a song now, apparently. If you've ever had to look after something, you know there's quite a kind of fear and trepidation, like, what if I mess up? What if I break this thing? If you've ever borrowed someone's precious item, what about if you had to look after God's own Son? Like, looking after a baby is hard enough.

I mess up every other day. But looking after God's own Son for him, you think, what a responsibility. But here's the question. What if there's something more going on than Joseph simply trying to protect this vulnerable child? What if, in the incarnation, right, what if this child isn't really as vulnerable as we think? You see, Matthew says, this wasn't about Herod. This was to fulfill something the Lord had spoken. Out of Egypt I called my Son. Because God wants people to know this is my Son. And so, who is this child? Who is this child? Well, in Proverbs, here are the words of Agur, right?

Who has ascended heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who established the ends of the earth? What is his name? And what is the name of his Son? Surely you know. Again, we read this. What is his name and what is the name of his Son?

[9 : 43] Here's what the angel has to say about that. Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom there will be no end.

Who is this child but the very Son of God? This is God's Son. And so, let me ask this just to ponder. Do you think that they went to Egypt because God was afraid of Herod? Do you think they went to Egypt because God was powerless against Herod? Is it too hard a thing for the eternal, almighty God of the universe to strike down a mere mortal human being, king or no king? Is it too hard a thing for the Lord to do that? You see, God could have removed Herod's breath in an instant if he wanted. He didn't need to send them to Egypt. He could have removed Herod's breath, could have taken it back. The Lord is the giver and taker of life. But the things that God spoke long ago will be fulfilled. So, it's less about this baby needing protected, and it's more about learning to trust and act on God's Word.

How much do we learn to trust without vulnerability? How much do we really learn to trust without being vulnerable? How much do we really learn to trust unless we're told to wait? And so, one way or another, God will fulfill His Word. God is faithful, there's no question about that. But the question is, are we human beings going to trust Him, even in the face of apparent great danger? God could have easily removed Herod from the equation, but He didn't. On the ground, think about how things look to Joseph on the ground. It looks like this child has the most basic protection package you could possibly get.

I mean, He's not got the secret service around about Him. He's not got the King's Guard. He's not got an army. He's not got secret agents. He's not got strong men. He's got a carpenter and a teenage girl, and maybe an animal to travel on, and that's it. Like, why would God put His own child in the hands of a carpenter and a teenage girl? Is this child really that vulnerable?

And yeah, I mean, we do get this angel who's a whistleblower. He's leaking information about this evil plan against this child, and it gave them just enough time to get out of there. But on the ground, it must have been tense. Imagine that. Get up. Middle of the night. Get up. Go. Someone's going to try and kill this child. Go. Go to Egypt. Jings. You've got a lot of time to plan. The Bible calls it their flight to Egypt. It's like a last-minute flight in the middle of the night.

[12 : 54] Ryanair. I mean, that's the equivalent, isn't it? They don't have a lot of confidence in their travel. But this is no coincidence, right? It's tense. It's vulnerable. Joseph's told to go to Egypt, but it's no coincidence that they're told to go to Egypt. What happened the last time? Is this not a signal to trust God? And so you see the fact that God would even send His Son. This is what the incarnation teaches us. The fact that God would even wrap His Son in flesh, and not just any flesh, the flesh of a baby. The Son in whom He was well pleased. The Son who shared divine glory before the world existed. The Son He loved before the foundation of the world. The fact that God would allow His own Son to become a little flesh-and-bones baby, and place His eternal Son into the hands of a young, inexperienced couple of Jews. What does that say? It seems like God's entire plan of redemption is hanging on such a thin and fragile thread. But is it? Is it? Is it hanging on such a fragile thread?

Could anything happen to this child when the Lord has spoken a word about him? Like, we see this later on. Joseph and Mary lose him in the temple. We see it even later on when he goes to Nazareth, and the people try and throw him off a cliff. It was never going to happen. Never. So I want to ask a question about this baby who's God's own Son, right? And we know how vulnerable a child is.

Do you think that God is watching on, nervously biting His nails, hoping that these humans don't mess up as they look after His Son? Is God's Son in this moment in the Scriptures, is God's Son out of His hands? Is He out of His hands? No. Well, let me ask this. Are we? Are we out of His hands?

Absolutely not. And so what I've been reflecting on is that Jesus, even as a baby, was never out with the plan of God. That if God's plan of redemption is wrapped up in swaddling cloths, carefully carried about by a young defenseless couple, at the mercy of censuses and death threats, if God chose what we would consider to be fragile and vulnerable, perhaps that God's Son is needing carried to Egypt, is really teaching Joseph and Mary what it is to trust God. We're going to mess this up, God. We're going to mess this up. God is saying, do you trust me? Do you trust me? You see, though a virgin, you will bear a son. Trust God. Joseph, take your wife. Take her to be your wife. Trust God.

Think about all these moments. Go, register in Bethlehem. Trust God. Go to Egypt. Don't worry. Trust God. Wait in Egypt until I tell you. I mean, they're like waiting about, how long we're going to be here? I don't know. He just said, wait until I tell you. Trust God. Nothing is going to stop God's plan. Trust God. And so, some people might like to only think of the Messiah coming in power at the start of his ministry as a young adult, doing miracles and confronting hypocrites. But here's the thing, right? Half the Gospels, 50% of the Gospels introduce us to this child. An ordinary, even weak, vulnerable child in the hands of ordinary and weak, vulnerable people, subject to things that are completely out of their control. But nevertheless, it shows what it means to trust God and His plan.

[16 : 58] The fact that God took on the form of a child invites us to trust God. They had to make do with what they had, didn't they? They had to make do with what they had. I mean, folks, we need to make do with what we've got. And it's hard sometimes. But God is saying, can you trust me with the things that you've got? It might be very little, but that'll only help you trust me more. They had to make do with what they had. They had to flee from their home. They were homeless. They had to wait until they heard. All the while, they had to deny themselves. Mary and Joseph had to deny themselves every day to care for this child. Was God not teaching them through a baby how to trust Him?

Do you see how even as an infant, Christ was teaching His parents how to trust God and live by faith? How can they possibly carry the weight of the responsibility of raising God's Son? Only by trusting God in their weakness. Only by trusting God in all their failings. Only by trusting God in every single danger and vulnerability. Only by trusting God in every unknown and chaotic situation they faced. God is in control, even when it looks like He's not. And so let me finish by saying this.

Trust God, regardless of what it looks like on the ground, obey His voice. It might seem like everything is hanging by a thread, and you are moving from one danger to the next, one unknown thing to the next. But you will find that in the end, all of these dangers are not a danger to His plan.

No, you will find in the end, God is going to fulfill through His Son exactly what He said. Isn't that what Matthew says? Yeah, oh, Herod's coming. Quick, get up, go to Egypt. Quick, he's going to look after, he's going to look for this child and destroy him. You need to go, you need to go quick. And Matthew says, no. All of this was actually to fulfill God's Word, because God is in control. So all this fretting, all this running from danger to danger, unknown thing to unknown thing in our lives, we will look back in the end and find, actually God was using all that just to fulfill exactly what He said He would do with us.

See, He who started a good work in you is going to bring it to completion. The one who says, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Guess what? See, when you die, what's going to happen next? You're going to live forever with Him.

[19 : 36] So trust God. Every danger that we face is not a danger to His plan. Every unknown that we face is not unknown to Him. God's going to fulfill through His Son exactly what He has spoken. So trust in Jesus, God's Son. Everything's in His hands. Let me finish with the words of Bill. Bill says, in His mighty grip. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, what does it tell us that You would send Your Son and wrap Him in swaddling cloths? Such a vulnerable little child, yet teaches us, even as a baby, to trust in You. Lord, please help us to see that everything You did in Jesus was just as You spoke.

Help us to see that through Jesus, all of Your promises are yes and amen. Help us to trust in Jesus and realize that everything is in His hands. Help us to trust in Jesus, because He is Your Son, and He reigns forevermore. Amen.