

Matthew 2:13–23

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[0 : 00] Matthew 2, 13 to 23, the text reads like this. Now, when they had departed, behold, 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. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region, who were 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. 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.

[1 : 24] 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 Archelius was reigning over Judah in the place of his 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 the city of Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning and Merry Christmas to you.

So glad that you're here on the Lord's Day and that we're gathered together in person. I know we have so many of our church families scattered around the country and the world over the holidays, but it is wonderful to be face-to-face in relationship with those that are here today.

I'm going to begin by asking you a question. I'm going to want you to take it personally. How confident are you in the claims of Christmas?

[2 : 47] What is your personal confidence level in the claims of Christmas? How certain would you say you are on a scale of one to ten?

Extremely confident, somewhat confident. I often wonder whether there's reason for confidence. No, I'm here today for reasons that are not personal to me.

You might be here today because someone in your family has asked you to attend on a Christmas morning, or you might be viewing online because you're out of town and your parents have told you, no, this is what we will do on Christmas Day.

But think about it. How confident are you in the claims of Christmas? I've become convinced that there is a crisis of confidence in the claims of Christmas.

I sincerely think that the indicators are many that would demonstrate the church's confidence and the truths of Christmas are waning, maybe lower than they've been at some time.

[4 : 10] Just think of the indicators of children raised in the church by church-going parents who, as soon as they go off to school or work after age 18, don't come back.

This is not anecdotal from me standing where I stand. This is the data of those who have actually explored the question.

There is an exodus, as it were, from the claims of Christmas from among those who were raised in the church.

Not only that, there's a declining number of people, particularly after COVID, I think, that are intrigued or interested in the claims of Christmas and even returning to a church to maybe hear about it.

No, we did that before, but in a post-COVID world, I'm done with it. I'm not coming back. There's also a crisis of confidence in the sense of if you are committed, there are fewer and fewer baptisms taking place in churches around the country, at least our country.

[5 : 27] There are fewer churches that are growing in numbers of men and women and children who clearly believe what Christmas claims.

And so I ask you to look the question in the eye, take it to your heart. How confident are you in the claims of Christmas?

I mean, let's be honest. Matthew's Christmas claims have been outrageous to this point in the text. Matthew constructed a genealogy to indicate that the one he's writing about, Jesus is none other than Israel's promised king by lineage.

And not only that, but by line of Abraham, one who would be a king who would bring blessing to everyone in the world. What a claim. What an outrageous claim.

Followed by Joseph. He introduced Joseph, who has a dream. And the birth of a child with his fiancée, his betrothed, never having known her, is now conceived miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 54] And so now the claim is out there based on a dream and based on a miracle and based on him waking up and following everything the angel had told him in the night vision.

That's an outrageous claim. Or think of last week, three or more wise men. Coming to Christmas on what claim?

A star? The one-off nature of some luminary in the night that led them from as distant places as Babylon on a multi-month mission to arrive in a city that Israel's king would have been born in, only then to find the star moving five miles south over Bethlehem, and they're arriving and bringing gifts. These are the claims of Christmas. Christmas. We have a king. I can show you his genealogy. We have a savior. I can tell you about the angel that visited me in a dream. We have one worthy of universal worship. For the star has made it so.

[8 : 20] We have one worthy of universal worship. I've been thinking about confidence. The church's need for it. Your rational right to have it.

You will need enough confidence to become a Christian. You certainly need ongoing confidence to keep yourself a Christian. And evidently, we're losing on both fronts.

We're not making many Christians today on these claims. And we're not keeping many who were Christians on the same. The importance of confidence.

I was thinking this week about what they call the Consumer Confidence Index, something of that nature. Have you heard of this?

They've been keeping it month by month since 1967. There are indicators that individuals track to determine the confidence a consumer might have as they look at the coming months.

[9 : 24] And the three major indicators are, you know, how much money do you think you have in the bank? Is that stable? How secure do you think your job is over the next few months?

Because if that's there, you're going to be confident. So the economy is good. You have some money in the bank. The chances of being unemployed are low. The greater your confidence, guess what?

The more likely you are to go spend. The worse the indicators for you, the more likely you are to keep a lid on things.

Confidence really is everything, and the church has very little in the bank. I almost wondered if by the time Matthew came to this part of the text, I hope you have your eyes on it, verses 13 to 23, he knew he was in need of instilling confidence to back up the claim.

And if that's the case, then perhaps even in the next 20 or 30 minutes, I can posit enough from this text to give you just enough confidence to make you a Christian on Christmas morning, or keep you a Christian till New Year's Day.

[10 : 51] Three times in this text, he seems to end with thinking he's accomplished something for the reader that would give them confidence in Christmas.

Did you notice it in verse 15? This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet. Or in verse 17, then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah.

Or the final verse that was read in 23, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled. Matthew, who has made three outrageous claims, is now providing three stories, as it were, that he thinks demonstrate some completion, some fulfillment, some grounds for your confidence. Well, I suppose he would be worth listening to then. Three stories, three indicators, if you will, that give you confidence.

First, verses 13 through 15, a little story about a family's flight to Egypt, and then they're going forth from Egypt.

[12:21] In verse 15, to fulfill something in the prophetic discourse, out of Egypt I called my son. What exactly is going on here?

The quote in verse 15 comes from a little-known minor prophet, Hosea. Minor, not by terms of importance, but just by length of writing.

It was a minor work, not a major work. Isaiah, he's the big dog. He's a major prophet. Hosea is a minor prophet. Not so long or lengthy.

But in the 11th chapter of Hosea, there's this single line, out of Egypt I called my son. What is Matthew doing referencing that here now?

Interestingly, in its original context, this was not a prediction that the Messiah would fulfill. In other words, Hosea was not saying the Messiah will come out of Egypt.

[13:31] No, he's merely stating that Israel, when she was redeemed, came out of Egypt.

So, perhaps this word fulfill needs to be thought of in terms of not merely a prediction that comes true.

Maybe there's a wider range of thinking about things that are fulfilled. And as I began to think about it this week, I thought, well, that's actually true.

The Old Testament isn't just all predictions that come true. But the word fulfillment can nevertheless be used. Think about it this way. If you wanted to be a state senator or a senator from this state to our country, what obligations would you have to fulfill to be able to represent us as a people?

You'd have to be a certain age. You would have had to live in, been a U.S. citizen for a certain number of years. And you would have to actually represent, live in the place of the people that you were representing.

[14:56] If you fulfill those obligations, then you can represent the people from that state. I think that's a bit of what's going on here in this first story.

What is fulfilled? By way of out of Egypt, I've called my son? Simply this. We now have in Jesus a representative.

One who can represent you before the heavenly father as a picture of redemption. Remember, that's what happened to Israel.

Israel had been ensconced in slavery in Egypt. And God called Israel out of Egypt as his own son. Israel represented the people of God who had been redeemed.

So, too, Jesus now, coming out of Egypt as a young child, stands as a representative of a redemption of a much higher order.

[16:05] He's a son out of Egypt. We have a new redemption story moving with him. He fulfills all of what Israel was doing in the past.

He now brings with greater emphasis in the present. Think of it this way. Israel's past is but the Christian's prologue.

That's the way I read the Old Testament. Israel's past put down in the Old Testament is but our prologue.

That's what Matthew is arguing. Jesus represents redemption as the Son of God. And he will be that redemption for all who come out with him.

And in his own life, he left Egypt and fulfilled that understanding. The second story is horrific in content.

[17:10] 16 to 18. What you really see here is Herod and all the evil fury of his ego.

Now, murdering children in the region of Bethlehem. Now, remember, Bethlehem was a small, small place on the outskirts of a small place.

And so this is not some nationwide genocide, but probably a couple dozen families would have been affected by this. And what he's arguing here, there's this quote here that he's now fulfilling. Jesus was fulfilled because at the time when Jesus was in Bethlehem, Herod himself began to murder male children who threatened his own throne.

And then Matthew says this was fulfilled that what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. And then you have this quotation, a voice was heard in Ramah.

[18:19] Now, what's going on here? It seems to me that what's going on here is he picks up on a Old Testament text that shows the city of Ramah as a stopping point between Jerusalem and Babylon when they were being carried off into deportation.

In other words, what was happening to Israel, it wasn't just that they came out of Egypt and were redeemed by God. But no, there was struggle. There was pain.

There was evil. There was hardship. There was sorrow. And they were actually deported all the way off into Babylon. But if you actually go back and look at Jeremiah 31, which I'm not asking you to do.

I did it for you this week. I went back. Jeremiah 31 is the turning point in Jeremiah. It's the first time you have any good news going on at all. This verse is a singular verse of sorrow embedded by 30 verses or more of hope.

And I think that's what he's picking up on. In Jesus, we have God's promised hope surrounding our present sorrow.

[19:45] That's something to hold on to. That what happened to Israel by way of a pattern is fulfilled in Christ and will be fulfilled for you on the ultimate day of his second coming.

For indeed, you and I both know sorrow. We know weeping. We know when we look out our windows at the world in which we live, there's not a lot there that would bolster our confidence in Christmas.

But if he's fulfilling by way of surrounding our sorrows, the way hope surrounds the moment in Israel's past, then indeed it is fulfilled.

And that's what Matthew's going to argue. He's going to argue not only is Christ a picture of your redemption, according to Israel's history, but Christ is a fulfillment of Israel's hope and yours.

Even if you don't see it in the midst of the wilderness. He's got one more story, this return to Nazareth, verses 19 to 23.

[21:08] And again, he concludes that something about Jesus going to Nazareth fulfilled the fact that he would be called a Nazarene. And I've asked myself, well, where is this in the Old Testament?

Notice, though, for the first time, there's a plural given, not singular, that was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled.

He's not quoting a particular text. He's not alluding to a specific text. He's indicating that the prophets generally expected a Messiah that would be a Nazarene.

It would be from Nazareth. So what do we know about Nazareth? Well, we know quite a bit. Bing was just there last week. It's a nowhere place where no one's from.

That's what it is. It's a place where one of Jesus's own disciples would say, can anything good come out of that place? It's a place that conforms to the prophecies of Isaiah and the suffering servant, that the one that we should expect to look for would be like a Nazarene.

[22:18] He would be despised by people, maligned, that there would be of no magnificence or stature to him. In this way, Jesus then, according to Matthew, is fulfilling every expectation you and I would have had for the Messiah.

Because God promised in the Old Testament that when his deliverer came, it would upset the wisdom of the world. It would turn the wisdom of the world on its head.

He would not be born in fine raiment. He would not be born in a king's house. He would not grow up in the halls of elite and sophisticated and educated individuals.

No, he'd be a Nazarene. He'd be humble, lowly, of ill repute. In these ways, then, this third story indicates that everything that you and I should have expected for a Messiah is fulfilled in Jesus.

The Bible gives you a Savior who conforms to the expectations of the one God said to look for. The Bible gives you a Savior who conforms to the hope that you need in the midst of all your sorrows, which God promises to one day bring.

[23:48] The Bible gives you a Savior born on Christmas Day who's a representative of a brand new redemption that will far exceed the one that Israel had when she exited from Egypt.

I don't know what else to appeal to you on this morning to raise your confidence in Christmas. I want you.

I've been praying, Lord, make Christians today. Could there be a better day to become a Christian than Christmas morning?

But on what basis? On the basis of a dream and of a vision and of some long ago put down miraculous moment that I'm somehow supposed to just go with?

On the basis that I was raised in it, therefore I stay in it? On the basis that I just think I've always believed it to be true?

[25 : 03] No. No. Not today. You should be a Christian. Because Jesus fulfills much more objectively than subjectively the things which we should have been looking for.

He's a no one from nowhere. And the Bible said is going to come from there. He's hope in the midst of your sorrows.

And your sorrows need hope. He conforms to that pattern. He represents a redemption that is in line with the big picture God gave through Israel's history to redeem everyone.

And he does it by fulfilling the words. The word of the Lord. I give you on this Christmas morning a representative of your redemption.

He's gone out. I give you hope for your sorrows. It will arrive. I give you an expectation that upsets the world's understanding, which is what you should have been looking for.

[26 : 21] And I give you all of that on the basis, not of a dream, not of a vision, not of a familial tie. But on the vision that it conforms to all the things that are here in Scripture.

Can I close by quoting Martin Luther for you? I call this Luther's consumer confidence quote. He says, Matthew is putting forward.

This gospel. Fulfills this history. And you can read it. You don't have to just feel it.

Our Heavenly Father. May we. Find. Strong reasons. For confident faith.

For. Bring some. Even through this word. To faith. Keep others in faith.

[27 : 55] Return. Even more. To faith. Grow our faith. This Christmas morn. In Jesus name. Amen.