

Out of Egypt

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 00] Christmas Day, this is also the last Sunday of the year, right? So, you know, if we were to do sort of a year in retrospect, I wonder how many of you would say, you know, this has been a tremendous year for me.

This has been a great year. Absolutely loved it. Some of you I know would say that. Some of you, you know, would probably feel about the exact opposite, perhaps. If complaints from my friends and from my family are any indications, 2016 was one of the most difficult years in a long time for many people.

You know, I don't think I've, it's been, I don't know that I've ever heard so many people express worries about their own future, worries about the future of the world, worries and fears about what's going on in their lives right now.

People have just got so many things on their minds. And at this time of year, you know, we're just blanketed with all of these sentimental songs about a white Christmas, about chestnuts roasting on an open fire.

I think for many people, all of these sentiments, they just don't have the comforting effect that they used to have. Because the purpose of all this sentiment is what we've done with Christmas is that we have tried to tame it.

[1 : 13] We have turned it into a domesticated, a commercialized holiday. It's become an escape. Christmas is an escape in our culture. It is an escape from our worries, from our fears, instead of the rescue that it is meant to be.

Christmas is not, Christmas is not meant to be an escape. It is meant to be a rescue. The original Christmas was the work of God's faithfulness in a world that was full of danger and full of fear.

And so, as we consider that, as we look that in the eye, what I'm going to do first is read part of a well-known series of events that occurred after Jesus was born on the first Christmas, over 2,000 years ago.

So these events, they're recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 2. So if you're using one of the Bibles that our ushers have provided, one of those blue Bibles, you'll find Matthew, chapter 2, on page 808.

So page 808, Matthew, chapter 2. And I'd ask you just to follow along with me in your copy of Scripture, whether it's a paper copy or on your smartphone.

[2 : 19] Follow along with me as I read from Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 through 15. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea. For so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

[3 : 38] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose, went before them, until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their

treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. This is a story I stopped there because those last three verses are, four verses are what we want to focus on today.

[4 : 55] The story does end sadly. It ends in terrible tragedy because Herod, when he finds out that these wise men, that these magi have not returned to him, he orders every baby boy in Bethlehem who is two years old or under to be executed.

To make sure that there are no rivals to his authority, to his power. He does this just like the ancient Pharaoh killed many of the baby boys of God's people Israel when they lived in slavery in the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh, when he did that, the reason he did that was because the people of Israel were multiplying in number. They were growing powerful in his land. And Pharaoh wanted, at all costs, to maintain his grip on power.

He wanted to keep God's people under his thumb. And in the same way, Herod is trying to do just that thing. He is trying to maintain his control.

He is trying to keep God from raising up a rival to his own rule, to his own authority. And so he tries to destroy the child that Matthew says is going to fulfill what the Lord had spoken.

[6 : 15] Herod tries to destroy the child who is going to be all that Israel was meant to be. The child who embodies the presence of the Lord. The child who acts as God's faithful and obedient servant.

The child who is going to fill the world with followers of the one true God who accepts no rivals to his power. Matthew writes in verse 15 that Herod's jealousy, Jesus' departure and return from Egypt, they took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken.

To fulfill what the Lord had spoken. Now to understand what Matthew is saying, we first have to understand the history of the people of Israel. These events correspond to the events of the first exodus of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt.

This first exodus from the land of Egypt. Something that we're going to learn a lot about in the new year as we prepare for a sermon series on the book of Exodus. The nation of Israel, their experience of being rescued from the power of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt.

It is now being encapsulated, their experience of being encapsulated in one man, the son of David. Born in David's city of Bethlehem. Jesus has become the new Israel.

[7 : 38] On a new exodus. And everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, everybody who has been united with Jesus Christ by faith in him, by faith in his work of redemption on the cross, we who are Christians now belong to the new Israel because we are in Christ, because we are united in Christ who is the true Israel.

We are now God's people. And so what this story tells us is that God has kept his word. God has kept his word.

God is faithful. He is steadfast, reliable, trustworthy, true. He is the same God now as he was then. And he is going to be the same God forever and ever. And God's words that we see here in scripture, they aren't just some sort of relics of the dusty past, something moderately interesting for scholars that should be kept in a library.

God's words are true and they remain meaningful for you and for me today. Now here's what God did for the Israelites at the birth of their nation.

[9 : 00] At that defining event, the Exodus. Centuries after the first Exodus, the prophet Hosea spoke these words from God in Hosea chapter 11. When Israel was a child, I loved him.

And out of Egypt, I called my son. Israel, Israel, the nation that God calls his son.

Israel was called out of Egypt. It was set apart for God. And in the same way, Jesus, God's son, is to be called out of Egypt as well.

He is to be called out, first of all, he's to be called out, meaning he's to be identified, set apart as this holy and dearly loved son of God.

God. And that's true for Jesus. And because we who are Christians are in Christ, it's true for us as well. It's true for everyone who's been united with Jesus.

[10:02] God has kept his word to set apart his chosen people. God has kept his word to set apart his chosen people. You and I, who are genuinely Christians, we are called out, we are identified, we are set apart by God as his holy and dearly loved children.

After the first Exodus, here's what the Lord told his people, here's what the Lord told the Israelites in Exodus chapter 19. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Now that Jesus has led us out on a second Exodus, now that he has obeyed the voice of the Lord, kept the covenant of the Lord on our behalf, here's what his apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 2.

You, you are a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. God has kept his word to set apart his chosen people.

[11:46] And not only has he done this, but God has kept his word to safeguard his chosen people. God has kept his word to set apart and to safeguard his chosen people.

Through Moses, here's what he told the people of Israel in Exodus chapter 6. I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

God has called out his people. Out of Egypt I called my son. He has not only called them out and set them apart for himself, but he has called them out to preserve and to protect them.

In the same way that he did with his people on the first Exodus, God kept his word to safeguard the new Israel, to safeguard Jesus Christ by calling him away from the threatening power of Herod.

Now this doesn't mean that Jesus didn't suffer under Herod. I mean, obviously he did. His family became refugees. They became migrants, fleeing for their lives, living in a country that was foreign to them.

[13:02] for a period of time. But God remained faithful to safeguard his dearly loved son. And just as God safeguards his chosen son, he also does the same.

He safeguards all those who are united with Christ Jesus by faith. Peter writes in 1 Peter chapters 4 and 5, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

He will safeguard you. God has kept his word to set apart and safeguard his chosen people. And so the Christmas message, it isn't a message of commercialized comfort.

It isn't a message of sentimental escape. The Christmas message is a message of a faithful and true God God who has kept his word throughout history.

[14:24] A God who will continue to keep his word to the son he loves and to the people he cares for. God has kept his word to set apart and safeguard his chosen people.

Let's give thanks to him. Our God, our Father, we do give thanks to you. You are a mighty God. You keep your word. You are faithful and true. Lord, when we look at your mighty acts of salvation under the Old Covenant and the Old Testament, we see a God who still works the same way today, who works to save and protect his people, and we are your people because we are united with your son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you that he came as the fulfillment of all that Israel was meant to be. We thank you that in Jesus Christ all your promises come to pass, and that through him all the promises are given to us. Our hope, our joy, our confidence come from Jesus Christ our Lord. It is through him that we have access to you. Thank you for giving him to us. He is an indescribable gift, and just like the Magi did. Lord, we ask that you may fill us with exceeding joy, knowing that we have a Savior born to us, Christ the Lord. Amen.

[16:00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.