

Christmas II

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[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Probably one of the most beloved and well-known stories in the Old Testament is the story of Joseph.

In fact, this story is so beloved and so well-known that it has even inspired a Broadway musical entitled Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

Now, that musical really has nothing to do with this morning's sermon. But for whatever reason, whenever I say the words Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, everyone instantly knows what Joseph I'm talking about.

So yes, I am talking about that Joseph. I am talking about the Joseph of the Old Testament who was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery and thrown into a dungeon for a crime.

He did not commit only to become one of the most powerful men in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh himself. However, there are several similarities between that Joseph and the Joseph we typically think about around this time of year, the Joseph who is the betrothed husband of the Virgin Mary.

[1 : 2 4] For example, Holy Scripture tells us that both Josephs had a father named Jacob. And Holy Scripture tells us that both Josephs saved their families by leading them into Egypt.

And Holy Scripture tells us that both Josephs had dreams. Now, the Joseph of the Old Testament, his dreams are pretty well known.

While the dreams of the Joseph who was the husband of the Virgin Mary are often forgotten.

However, in Matthew chapter 1, verse 20, we read And in Matthew chapter 2, verse 13, An angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take Jesus and his mother and flee to Egypt in order to escape the wrath of King Herod.

And sometime later, in Matthew chapter 2, verse 19, an angel again tells Joseph in a dream to return to Israel because King Herod had died.

And today, in Matthew chapter 2, verses 22 to 23, we read, But when Joseph heard that Archelias was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

[2 : 5 7] And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee, and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, which is how our Lord, who was born in Bethlehem, came to be known as a Nazarene.

For again, Holy Scripture tells us that both Josephs had a father named Jacob, both Josephs saved their families by leading them into Egypt, and both Josephs had some pretty incredible life-changing dreams.

And the reason I'm making all these connections between the Joseph who had a coat of many colors and the Joseph who was the Virgin Mary's husband is because this is pretty much all St. Matthew tells us about Joseph.

For I believe that St. Matthew, who wrote his gospel primarily for a Jewish audience, wanted his Jewish readers to make these connections and wanted his Jewish readers to understand this profound truth, that Jesus Christ is God's Son in a way that Israel is not.

For if you ask a Christian who is God's Son, hopefully they'll tell you Jesus. But if you ask a Jew who is God's Son, well, they will probably say Israel.

[4 : 3 2] For all throughout the Old Testament, Israel is repeatedly called God's firstborn Son. For example, in Exodus 4, verse 22, God tells Pharaoh, Israel is my Son, my firstborn.

For symbolically, Israel was God's firstborn Son, in that throughout the Old Testament, God favored the people of Israel above every other nation.

For God loved, supported, and even disciplined Israel like a father loves, supports, and disciplines his Son. However, Israel is never, ever called God's only begotten Son, and that is something we

must never forget.

For the term firstborn only refers to a special status or favorable position, while the term begotten refers to a person's actual nature.

For example, my sister is adopted, and if she were older than me, then she would be my parents' firstborn child, even though my parents did not beget her.

[5 : 55] For the language of begetting or begotten implies that the child in some way shares the same nature or the same DNA, if you will, as the parents.

So in the Old Testament, Israel is often called God's firstborn Son in order to symbolically show the special relationship between Israel and God.

However, only Jesus is called God's begotten Son because only Jesus, and not Israel, is of the same nature or the same substance as God his Father.

As we confess in the Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ is very God, very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.

So as we read in Hosea chapter 11, when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. Yet before any of us think that this verse only applies to ancient Israel, let us remember the words we heard this morning, the words of Matthew chapter 2, verses 14 to 15.

[7 : 14] And when Joseph arose from his dream, he took Jesus and his mother by night and departed for Egypt, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, out of Egypt I called my son.

For St. Matthew wants both for his Jewish readers as well as for all of us to see that Israel's salvation is not confined merely to the story of the Exodus, but is ultimately confined to the story of Jesus Christ.

For Jesus Christ is the new and greater Israel, a perfect and obedient son who is the fulfillment of all that was written by Moses and the prophets.

And in both the Old Testament and in the new, Joseph is the heroic guardian and protector of Israel who led his family to safety in Egypt.

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.