

Escape to/from Egypt

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” – Elizabeth says of Mary – but we wonder if they are blessed, or cursed. Mary comes perilously close to being stoned to death because of her assumed unfaithfulness – and even Joseph’s “solution” of divorcing her is not without its difficulties.

Then, Joseph and Mary (great with child) have to make the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem – and whether Mary walked, or rode a donkey, this was a most difficult trip. And their adventures were just getting started.

They arrive in Bethlehem “but there is no room for them in the inn.” Dr. Luther says that – “they were, of all, the lowest and the most despised, and must make way for everyone until they are shoved into a stable to make a common lodging and table with the cattle, while many cutthroats lounged like lords in the inn.”

And now, another dark cloud passes over this mother and child – for we hear from the mouth of the Lord that they must “flee to Egypt.” They are not only fleeing Herod who seeks to kill this rival king – it is the old evil serpent who is behind all this – seeking to devour the woman’s child the moment He is born – seeking to destroy the Savior.

Sounds like a movie plot, doesn’t it? Maybe a Mel Gibson-type can scrape off all the glorious veneer which has covered the Nativity of Our Lord for years – and show us the Passion of the Christ, even from His birth.

We’ve seen the prequel to this story. We hear of Jesus, born of Mary, who is wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in the wooden manger – but we’ve heard of another beloved son, Isaac, who is wrapped and bound by his father and laid upon an altar.

Isaac comes perilously close to death – but his life is spared – by another Sacrifice, another Son. Jesus is the Lamb for sacrifice – wrapped and bound, not just in swaddling cloths, but in grave cloths. As an icon in an old Byzantine Church shows – were one wall has Lazarus coming out of the tomb, still wrapped tight in his burial cloths – and another wall has the infant Jesus who is wrapped in the same cloths – even from His infancy, Jesus is destined for the tomb.

“Take off the grave clothes and let him go,” Jesus said when He raised Lazarus from death to life. So also, IN CHRIST – the death which enfolds you – has been destroyed. He has taken off your grave cloths, neatly folded them and laid them aside – for in the waters of Holy Baptism – you have died and been raised to life again with Jesus.

Our text today, grows even darker, with the murder of the Holy Innocents – those “male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under” – murdered by King Herod, in his attempt to kill Jesus.

We’ve seen the prequel to this story too. In the days of old, the King of Egypt ordered the midwives who attended to the Hebrew women while giving birth – to kill the child, if it were a boy. Pharaoh ordered that “every boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile.”

Do you remember how one of those boys escaped death in Egypt – how the baby Moses was spared a watery death – being saved through the water? His ark was not the size of Noah’s ark – but it was big enough to cradle a little child.

The infant Moses was spared because he was to deliver God’s people from their bondage and slavery in Egypt. He was to be “as God” to them – breaking their bonds, shepherding them in the wilderness, feeding them, and bringing them to the green pastures of the Promised Land. But Moses does not lead them into the Promised Land – another is given to do that – a Joshua, a Jesus.

Jesus is sent into Egypt in order to save His people from their sins. He doesn’t die like the Holy Innocents in Israel – or like the Hebrew boys in Egypt – because it is not yet time for Him to die.

Egypt is the PRISON HOUSE – a reminder of the bondage of God’s people. Jesus goes into Egypt – taking all sin and bondage to Himself. For this He was sent from heaven to earth – into our flesh and blood – to deliver us from our Egypt. And He is so thoroughly wrapped in the sin of the whole world that He cannot move on His own – but must go where His Father carries him – even into death.

The world sneers at a God who would be so humble, and helpless. The world mocks our God and Savior. What kind of a Savior is this who must be carried INTO and OUT OF Egypt? How can this One, who must Himself be saved – save us? How can He possibly deliver us from bondage to freedom – from death to life?

HOW? By being born of a woman when the time had fully come. By being born under the Law – so while wrapped in the world's disobedience to God's Law, He may perfectly do all that His Father desires – and declare, "It is finished."

And when the time fully comes – by shedding His blood, breathing His last, and giving up the Spirit. This Savior, Jesus, is not spared from death – He is given INTO death, drowned in death, and buried in the depths of darkness.

"Out of Egypt I called my Son." The Father calls Jesus from death and the grave – raising Him up to everlasting life. All of this so that the Father might call you out of your bondage to sin and death – you, His beloved child, baptized into Christ Jesus.

He has delivered you from your Egypt – and now, standing on the shores of the promised land - He calls you to His altar, to taste and see that the Lord is good – to eat and drink the abundance of His salvation, as you eat and drink the Body and Blood of your Savior.

Out of Egypt you have been called – to live in heaven – to live in Christ now by faith – and to live with Him in glory for all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.