



## **Shelby Christian Church**

CHRISTMAS - HOLY MOMENTS: THE EARLY YEARS OF JESUS' LIFE

MATTHEW 2:13-23 \* 12/28/2025

### **MAIN POINT**

The story of Jesus is a threat to those who are primarily committed to their own glory.

### **INTRODUCTION**

**What are some things that you tend to be paranoid about?**

**Have you ever acted on a paranoia, such as getting up in the night to check the locks or going to the doctor out of fear you caught someone's illness?**

**What is paranoia usually a sign of?**

Paranoia means "baseless or excessive suspicion of the motives of others." While it can be a severe mental disorder, all of us experience mild paranoias from time to time. Have you ever thought someone was following you or trying to break into your house? That's paranoia. When we are paranoid about something, it's always rooted in a greater fear we have. In the text from the Christmas story that we are discussing today, we read that King Herod was paranoid someone would steal his throne, and that paranoia drove him to desperate, often tragic lengths. Little did he know the real intentions of the baby Jesus—to save people from their sins and release them from bondage and fear.

### **UNDERSTANDING**

Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem seeking the newborn King of the Jews. Judea's current king, Herod, told the wise men to look for the young King in Bethlehem, then return and tell him the specific location. Following a unique star, the wise men located Jesus and in an act of worship offered Him expensive gifts. Being warned in a dream, they returned to their homeland without informing Herod of Jesus' whereabouts (Matt. 2:1-12).

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:13-15.**

**What are some ways that God provides guidance for Christians today, like he did through the angel?**

**What did it cost Joseph to get Jesus out of harm's way?**

**This is not the first time the angel spoke to Joseph and he obeyed. From what we know about Joseph, why do you think God chose him to be Jesus' earthly father?**

**What is radical obedience? Why should radical obedience to Jesus be the normal response for a Christian?**

Scripture records that Joseph obeyed all the angel's commands. This verse gives us an important hint as to why God selected Joseph as Jesus' earthly father: He listened to the word of God and obeyed it

without hesitation. Joseph was so committed to obeying God that he didn't even wait for sunrise before fulfilling the Lord's command.

**Read Matthew 2:15 again. What was the significance of Jesus' time in Egypt?**

**Read Hosea 11:1. How is this verse fulfilled in Jesus? What does this teach us about God's work to save His people?**

**Why is Jesus the ultimate example of God's compassion?**

As Matthew noted in his Gospel, God had foreseen all these events more than 700 years before they occurred. What was spoken by the Lord through the prophet Hosea was fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son. This is yet another example of the story of salvation being woven throughout the Bible.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:1-12 AND 2:16-18.**

**Based on Herod's response to the news of the coming Messiah, what kind of person do you think he was?**

Verse 16 describes Herod's shocking but not uncharacteristic reaction to the wise men's disobedience. Although Herod accomplished many great things while king, including the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, he was ultimately controlled by paranoia and fear. As "king of the Jews," Herod murdered anyone who he viewed as a threat to his throne, even his own wife and children. Herod's paranoia was so strong that even with his kind of power he felt threatened by a child.

**What does Herod's response say about his view of the Messiah?**

**How did Jesus meet or contradict those expectations?**

**What are the notable differences between the characters of these two kings, Herod and Jesus?**

Herod was blinded by power and selfish ambition, and like many he misunderstood the role of the Messiah. He knew the prophecies about the Messiah and feared Jesus would take his place. He thought Jesus' reign would be one of military power and an earthly throne, rather than the power of God and a heavenly throne. Herod was an antithesis for Christ; his selfishness and evil stand in direct contrast to Jesus' selflessness and love.

**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:19-23.**

Matthew 2:19-23 is a closing section concerning the infancy and early life of Jesus. His return to Israel with His family and their settling in the city of Nazareth is again a prophetic fulfillment. From reading the birth and infancy narratives alone, a Christian soon learns a great deal about Jesus' identity. He was God's unique Son.

**How would you describe Jesus' mission, in your own words?**

By coming from Nazareth, God shows us once again how He operates contrary to conventional wisdom. He is counter-cultural. This is another of the Bible's great themes. God chooses younger sons rather than older sons. God uses women who were outcasts to accomplish His purposes. God always chooses the unloved. So it shouldn't be a surprise that God chooses Nazareth as the place Jesus grew up, not Jerusalem, which would have been the obvious choice for the Messiah. This is another example of God's "upside down Kingdom" on display, which is the focus of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It doesn't matter who you are or where you're from. God works through anybodies and nobodies. His arms are open wide.

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Even as a baby, Jesus was divisive. How do you see the divisiveness of Jesus' authority play out in our world and relationships today?**

**Before you became a Christian, did you wrestle with the authority of Jesus? If so, what are some of the fears or questions you had?**

**What impact has our study of the Christmas story had on your preparation for Christmas?**

**How can you use this part of Jesus' birth story to share the gospel with someone?**

## PRAYER

## COMMENTARY

### Matthew 2:13-23

2:13-15. When the Magi finally left to go back to their own land, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel told Joseph to gather his family and move to a country that was the archenemy of Israel. Why Egypt and not some other location? Simple prophetic fulfillment of Hosea 11:1. We see in both Hosea 11:1 and Numbers 24:8 an allusion to the future, when God would call "him" out of Egypt. The scene was being set for those prophecies to be fulfilled by Jesus when He returned from Egypt.

It must have been frightening to move to enemy territory. God gave Joseph the reason for this drastic move. Herod was planning to find Jesus to kill Him. Joseph recognized the dream as God speaking to him. He gathered his family and left immediately for Egypt, once again trusting and obeying. The family stayed in that country until Herod the Great died.

2:16-18. Herod would do anything to protect his own interests, including murdering children. Even though Herod the Great accomplished some wonderful achievements (such as major construction) during his reign, he is best known for his extreme paranoia and the bloodshed that ensued. The story of his slaughter of young boys in and around Bethlehem is consistent with the pattern of his life.

At the time of Herod's slaughter of infant boys, Jesus must have been around one and one-half to two years old. Herod, in his paranoia, would have allowed for a margin of error in the estimate of the child's age, ordering that the age range of those killed be high enough to include this king of the Jews (2:16). Demographers tell us there would have been perhaps two dozen boys two years old and under who were killed because of Herod's obscene order. The weeping would have filled the night from Bethlehem to Ramah. Consider the arrogance of this man. He was observant enough to recognize the truth of Old Testament prophecies about God's plan, but arrogant enough to think that he could thwart it. No created being, not even Lucifer, can thwart the plan of God. In this situation, God the Father intervened to protect His Son and to preserve our salvation.

The quote in 2:18 is from Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah prophesied during the decades leading up to and immediately following Judah's fall to Babylon in 586 B.C. His ministry was one of proclaiming doom and judgment. However, he, like most Old Testament prophets, included a message of hope of forgiveness and restoration. Jeremiah 30-31 gives us a lengthy oracle focused on the future restoration of Judah. Even in this oracle of hope, Jeremiah occasionally mentions the sorrow and devastation of Judah, by way of contrast with the joy that would follow. Jeremiah's specific prophecy

relates to the captivity in Babylon and the killing of children during Babylon's conquest of Judea. Its parallel here is striking.

The verse Matthew quoted regarding the children slaughtered by Herod is one of these sorrowful notes common in Jeremiah's ministry. But in its original context it is immediately followed by, "This is what the Lord says: 'Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,' declares the Lord. 'They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:16-17). Perhaps a number of bereaved parents in and around Bethlehem found comfort in the Lord's promise, trusting, without understanding, that there was some kind of meaning behind their tragedy. Matthew probably intended his readers, familiar as they were with the Old Testament, to understand the context of hope in which this tragic verse was originally planted, and so to be led one step closer to finding hope in the Messiah.

2:19-23. The threat to the young king did not end with his return to Israel after Herod's death. The Lord confirmed Joseph's fears of Herod's cruel son (2:22), and so Joseph took his family farther north to his and Mary's hometown, Nazareth in Galilee (see Luke 1:26-27; 2:39). At this time Galilee was an out-of-the-way province, far from the centers of religious and political power in Jerusalem. The Father wanted the King's beginnings to be quiet and unnoticed, where He would grow to maturity among the common people whom He had come to save.

Nazareth was a neighborhood with a dubious reputation (see John 1:46). It was a Roman military post with all the attendant and "disreputable" trappings. While Jesus grew up with strong convictions, keeping Himself from giving in to the temptations that surrounded Him, He learned in this setting to understand and have compassion on the sick and sinful people around him (see Luke 2:40). His ability to dine with the outcasts (Matt. 9:10-13) did not develop overnight. Although the turn of events in Joseph's return with his family to Israel may seem haphazard, God had a purpose in every detail.

Matthew uses the formula "in order to fulfill" thirteen times in his Gospel. Among them, Matthew 2:23 is unique. It refers to the prophets. This plural usage is helpful in explaining that this statement is not found verbatim in any one prophet in the Old Testament. Rather, it seems to be an indirect quotation summarizing the tenor of more than one prophet. What Matthew intended to communicate was not a word-for-word quote found in a specific location, but a theme supported in multiple locations in the Old Testament.

Why did Matthew highlight this negative anticipation of Messiah's ministry? A couple of reasons are likely. First, by the time Matthew wrote his account, the word Nazarene had become a household adjective describing anything despised and scorned. When Christ's followers were called members of "the Nazarene sect" by their enemies (Acts 24:5), the term was intended as an insult.