

The Second Sunday after Christmas, A ✕ D 2011

Matthew 2:13-23

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Do you wish you were there, in Bethlehem, seeing first-hand the newborn Christ, watching with shepherds and singing with angels? Do you wish to have seen the Holy Family, seen smiling Mary and beaming Joseph? Would it be easier to believe if you could have seen with your eyes the events you can now only hear with your ears? But what would you have seen? After the Magi appeared in Herod's palace, seeking the newborn King of the Jews, Herod felt threatened. Presuming himself to be the King of the Jews, Herod sought this would-be usurper. Were you there in Jerusalem then, your eyes would see Herod soldiers marching into town, forcing themselves through doors, grabbing baby boys screaming from the clutches of their sobbing mothers. You would see the streets running with rivers of blood, and Herod's henchmen marching away to the wailing of the Israelite mothers. Perhaps you would see the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt. What does all that do for your faith? Babies dying while the Baby whose birth shepherds and angels acclaimed flees with His family to a foreign country.

2 What kind of Savior is that? But what you see is not what you get. This is not a timid Savior fleeing to save His own hide, but the Son of God fulfilling the prophecies written about Him. "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [Hosea], 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" Jesus stays in Egypt while murdering Herod leaves a river of blood in Jerusalem. Then, when the threat has passed, Joseph brings his family back in safety to Nazareth. But what you see is not what you get.

3 What if you were among the people of God, the children of Israel. After a miraculous deliverance by God through the hand of Joseph, Israel and all his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren packed up and left Canaan to move to prosperous Egypt. There, in Egypt, they enjoyed relative ease and comfort, given the choice land and the favor of Pharaoh. But time passed, and eventually, a Pharaoh with little knowledge of history, who knew nothing of Joseph, came to power. And because he feared the size of the growing population of the Hebrews, enslaved all the descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel, the people of the One true God. But the more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied. Eventually, Pharaoh, fearing for his throne, ordered the Hebrew midwives to put every boy born to the Hebrews to death. When they refused, Pharaoh ordered the Egyptians, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live."

4 What you see is not what you get. From the slaughtered Hebrew boys, one is saved, snatched from a basket in the Nile to be raised by his own mother in the court of Pharaoh's daughter. But could God really use this stammering, scared man to stand up to Pharaoh to deliver the Israelites from slavery? And if He did, could He really get millions of Israelites away from a hotly-pursuing, horse-and-chariot-led army of Egyptians? Your eyes would have seen pursuing Egyptians and a barrier of the Red Sea. Even after deliverance from the Egyptians, you would have seen a never-ending wilderness, which took forty years of wandering seemingly lost under the leadership of this Moses to navigate. Your eyes would have seen a scarcity of food and a drought of water. But what you see is not what you get. Water flows from a rock; each

morning means manna, and every evening heralds quail; and the Promised Land is always just over the horizon.

5 Even in this Christian life, what you see is not always what you get. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”

6 Your eyes see persecution, yet your ears hear of deliverance. Your eyes see bills unpaid and mounting debt, but your ears hear of daily bread, which is always enough. Your eyes see a Savior who seems to delay His return, but your ears hear that the Lord is not slow to fulfill His promises. Your eyes see the wicked prosper, but your ears hear that treasure in Heaven is all that moth and rust and death cannot destroy. Your eyes see Christians persecuted, ridiculed, considered naïve and ignorant, but your ears hear that disciples of Jesus can expect persecution. What you see is not what you get. Repent of believing only your eyes.

7 The Savior smuggled by His step-father Joseph into safety in Egypt wasn’t fleeing danger. He was fleeing Herod’s aggression and a timeline different from His. He didn’t leave the boys of Bethlehem to fend for themselves anymore than the Israelites were left helpless in Egypt or in the wilderness. He doesn’t flee to save His life but to give His life. He’s not fleeing to Egypt to save His life but yours. The plan was not for Herod to murder this Infant King, but the plan was for Him to die. No one could take His life from Him, but He laid it down of His own accord. He fled Herod’s sword to be nailed to the cross.

8 The benefits of His death and resurrection, Jesus has given you and continues to deliver to you. Your eyes see simple water, but your ears hear that this water included in God’s command and combined with His Word is the way He washes away your sin and gives you new life. Your eyes see only a splash of water, but your ears hear of a cleansing flood that drowns a sinner and produces a saint. Your eyes see a man with sins similar to your own, who struggles against his own sinful flesh as you struggle against yours, but your ears hear that God has placed this man into an office much bigger than himself, an office through which God has chosen to deliver to you forgiveness. Your eyes see bread and wine, in fact, your mouth tastes bread and wine, but your ears hear “The Body of Christ, given for you” and “The Blood of Christ, shed for you.”

9 What you see is not what you get. What you get is beyond what you can see. Jesus who was born to live, die, and rise to save you from your sins has promised to return. Until then, God remains hidden. When the world offers persecution, which St. Peter says it inevitably will, God is hidden. But hidden is not absent. Jesus hid Himself in human flesh, hid Himself on the cross. Everything you know about God you know through the lens of the cross. On the cross is Jesus for you. In the font, God has hidden Himself for you. In Holy Absolution, in His Supper, Jesus has hidden Himself for you. Hidden now, Jesus will be revealed at His return. Hidden with Him now, His Church will be fully revealed then. What you see is not what you get. But what you get is what you will see.

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