

## **The Journey Begins – Matthew 2:13-23**

Happy New Year!

The title of today's talk is "The Journey Begins" and we're looking at Matthew 2:13-23. We're mindful that Matthew wrote this gospel for the Jewish nation, the people of Israel. I'll draw parallels between Jesus and the birth of Israel as a nation chosen by God, and Moses saving the Israelites from destruction by Pharaoh. I'll then explore what that means for us in 2017.

In this passage we see that Joseph, warned in a dream, takes Mary and the baby Jesus and flees to Egypt. We see the fear and reaction of Herod, who murders all the children under two years old in an attempt to kill Jesus. Finally there is the return of Joseph, Mary and Jesus from Egypt to Nazareth, again guided by an angel in a dream. This account is not in the other Gospels, and as we look, we'll see the symbolic parallel between Moses and Jesus: a parallel that would not have been lost on the Israelites.

We'll start with the angel appearing to Joseph in a dream telling him "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother". We'll recall that Joseph's first dream in Matthew 1:20 revealed that the child was conceived of the Holy Spirit, ensuring that Joseph honoured his marriage with Mary, so we see in Matthew, God's continuing guiding force as the masterplan of events unfold.

Why would Joseph flee to Egypt? At the time there was a colony of about a million people, so an obvious place to escape Herod. Egypt also brings to mind the book of Exodus, in the book of Exodus, in Egypt, Israel became a nation: the chosen people of God. Exodus 14 speaks of Moses saving the Israelites from the wrath and destruction of Pharaoh. If Moses saved the Israelites from Pharaoh, then Matthew is setting the scene for Jesus to transcend the books of the law and for Jesus to become the propitiation of our sin, pardoning our sin so that we may come into the presence of God without being destroyed by God's just judgement for our rebellion.

Matthew amplifies the parallel between Jesus and Moses by quoting an Old Testament prophet. In Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Here Matthew is drawing powerful parallels with Moses. Moses led the people out of Egypt, and saved the nation from

destruction. Jesus is saving us from the bondage and destruction of our sin, an act of love and grace, from our rebellion against the purity and holiness of God.

Matthew's gospel is peppered with the fulfilment of prophecy to amplify to the Israelites that Jesus is Messiah and the saviour. As Herod murders the children of Bethlehem and surrounding area, Matthew makes reference to Jeremiah 31:15, with Rachel, the mother of the 12 tribes of Israel weeping for her children. Just as Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, so Herod tried to kill Jesus. God in both cases had other plans. God is unstoppable, and Jesus as we see later in the Gospel is victorious in overcoming darkness.

Our final fulfilment of prophecy in this passage is in v23 from Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient of times."

In this short passage alone, there are three fulfilled prophecies. There are parallels with Moses and the birth of the nation of Israel, and now a new birth, the birth of Jesus that will radically and eternally change our relationship with God. Matthew leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is the Messiah and our saviour. At the heart of this passage is our reconciliation with God. Not saved by observing the Mosaic law, but justified by a new saviour in Jesus the Messiah.

What does this mean for you and me in 2017? Matthew is shouting to the Israelites, this is the Messiah, our saviour! Are we also listening to this message too?

Deep down we want to know our God. Deep down we yearn to be loved and accepted. Deep down we want to be known, and for a deep and significant relationship with God, our creator. Where does seeking God fit in our priorities? How serious are we in embracing a deeper relationship with God? Are we changing our life to really seek to know God more?

In the CofE, those that seek a deeper relationship with God are encouraged to read the Bible daily, and develop a discipline of daily prayer. This sounds very easy, yet challenging at the same time. We all have access to a Bible, most of us have one at home.

I've recently discovered and installed the Lectionary app for my phone, this sets passages for each day to read the entire Bible every two years. There are of course other apps, and more traditional Bible notes to encourage us.

I've discovered over the years, that a day rooted in Bible study and prayer is a good day. I feel joyful, and more centred and in focus. I can testify to the power of the word of God and to prayer in my life. There are times when I don't manage to start my day in prayer, and I can only describe those days as being ... "out of focus".

If we want a deeper relationship with God, we need to focus on our journey, and we need to take immediate action.

You'll be pleased to know that over the coming weeks we will be on a journey, studying to become more like Christ, and this will also be part of our Lent course this year.

I had the recent privilege of attending a funeral service in this Church and was struck by the assurances for Christians of the everlasting life with God. The final transformation, when we are united with God in heaven. We're all too aware of God's holiness, and our need for Jesus as our saviour, to wipe the slate clean so we can have that everlasting life with God.

There are 5000 people in Sunningdale, about 1000 under the age of 18. 1000 young people, how will they find out about Jesus? What will happen to all the people that don't discover Jesus? I personally find this a very disturbing question.

There were 93 children at the crib service, and 180 adults. I recognised a few people, but most were not regular attendees. There were four school services, and I counted 120 adults and over 30 children at the Charters carol concert alone, which had 9 Bible readings and a Homily. Probably a dozen or so people in each service wanted a copy of Luke's gospel and took an Alpha invitation.

There is hope. There is hope for 5000 people and a 1000 young people in Sunningdale. Jesus is their saviour just as Jesus is our saviour.

As a Church and the body of Christ, we are taking some practical steps to reach out to our neighbours:

- Rendezvous Café on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January
- Café Style service on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January
- Alpha course starting in the evening of Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>

There are also simple practical steps we can take such as following and sharing Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

I'm sure our hearts go out to all those that don't know Jesus. Can we be the hands and feet of Jesus too?