

## The Flight into Egypt – and Related Events

A post-Christmas sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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“Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’” (Matthew 2:13)

Conceivably there may have been as many as 500 people living in Bethlehem at the time the Lord was born, and maybe as many as 20 or 25 children under two years of age. That Herod was willing to have all of these children killed in order to be secure the death of one specific Child speaks volumes about the fear and cruelty of the man. It also brings to mind the fear and cruelty of the Egyptian Pharaoh when Moses was born, since he also ordered that all the male children of the Israelites be killed at birth. People like this can do incredible harm, and the fact that they can get away with it is a testimony to the influence of the hells among people generally. Furthermore it’s at least interesting that Moses *represented* the Word, specifically the truth of the Word, and the Lord came into the world as the Human *embodiment* of the Word. And the fact that both were miraculously saved from destruction shows that the Lord will do whatever it takes to ensure the human race has access to His Word, that is, His Divine love and wisdom.

Still, the question has to be asked, if the Lord could perform this miracle of salvation for Moses *and for Himself as a little child*, why didn’t He prevent the destruction of all those other innocent babies? It’s the very opposite of what they said at His crucifixion 33 years later: “He saved others; Himself He cannot save!” (Matt. 27:42). What’s going on here? And why would the Lord have to flee anywhere, anyway? Isn’t all the love, wisdom and power of God focused in Him? He certainly did not try to avoid the crucifixion. And He did, of course, save Himself!

Well, the answers to these questions are all tied up in the purpose of the Lord’s birth and life in this world. You see, as Mr. Smith pointed out on Christmas Day, He did not suddenly just appear out of nowhere as a mature adult Divine presence. Rather He created a human body for Himself in the same orderly way that every human body is created, with all its natural limitations, in the womb of a natural mother. And because human consciousness is a result of the interplay between natural and spiritual influences, growing in awareness, comprehension and power as the organic forms of the body are developed and trained, even the Lord of the universe determined to grow gradually on earth from a state of helpless infancy to one of total mastery. We call this process “the glorification,” and if we want to know the Lord and appreciate what He did for us, it will be good to get some understanding of it.

The first thing to note and remember is that one who is perfect is simply not subject to the influence of any evil or falsity. Such a person just isn’t affected by it, in fact His love and wisdom would so overwhelm the approach of anything less than perfect that it would consume it as surely as a bonfire would consume a piece of paper tossed into it, or as the sun would consume a rocket shot into it. So in order to *confront* the evils and falsities of our human experience without consuming everybody in the process, the Lord *limited* and *accommodated* His presence to a finite form that could be approached and even attacked by the selfish and deceitful in order to a) exposed that evil, and b) correct it through a gradual educational process.

As we read in the heavenly doctrine, the Lord's soul was Divine from conception; that's why He was called "the Son of God." But His body was from the material stuff of this world, nourished in the womb of Mary. And His conscious mind, *specifically His understanding and wisdom*, grew in the matrix of these two elements. As we read, "In respect to His Human He was, for this reason, an infant like other infants, a boy like other boys, and so on; with the sole difference that this development was accomplished in Him more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than in others" (TCR #89).

And how was this done? Of course the Lord experienced all the usual states of infancy and childhood, learning how to interpret sensory input, how to eat solid food, how to walk and talk, and eventually how to reason things out and perceive the truth when it was presented to Him. But in His case more than any others, and from earliest childhood, His special focus was on the written Word, the Torah, the Old Testament Law and the Prophets. As we read,

"The external mind<sup>1</sup> is seated in the body and the senses, and does not receive anything celestial or spiritual unless concepts of knowledge are implanted in it as in soil. Celestial things are able to utilize these as their own recipient vessels, but those concepts must be from the Word. Concepts of knowledge from the Word are such as lie open from the Lord Himself, for the Word itself comes from the Lord by way of heaven, and the Lord's life is present in every single detail of it, though this is not to be seen in the external form. From this it may become clear that in childhood *the Lord wished to take in no other concepts than those of the Word*, which, as stated, was laid open to Him from Jehovah Himself, His Father, with whom He was to be united and become one. And that wish was even stronger for the reason that no statement occurs in the Word that does not inmosty have regard to Him and does not in the first place come from Him" (AC #1461).

In other words, as the Lord learned the truths of the Scriptures and what these truths meant, He was learning about *Himself* and about all the temptations He would face in His ministry among Jews and Gentiles alike. He was learning what these temptations involved, how to deal with them, how to inform and inspire people in the process, and how those people would respond. He must have known very early on that He would be crucified and rise again, as this is all foretold in the Prophets and Psalms, not to mention the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the kings.

This is the real reason Mary and Joseph took Him down into Egypt – not so much for fear of Herod, though anybody rightly *should* be afraid to confront evil and falsity *unprepared* – but for the sake of His education in the synagogues of Egypt, where there was historically a large and prominent Jewish settlement. Besides, Egypt throughout the Word symbolizes knowledge where again, historically, the ancient library at Alexandria was a repository of worldly wisdom, and where knowledge of the afterlife and spiritual things generally was represented in the art and culture of the land. So the Lord's time in Egypt was spent *learning* in preparation for the work of His life, which was nothing less than the redemption and salvation of the whole human race.

But let's look more specifically at the temptations the Lord would endure. Generally when we think about this we think about the Lord being persecuted by the nasty people of the world and

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<sup>1</sup> "mind" is here used as a translation for "man," meaning human, since the essential human is the mind.

having to confront *them* with insight and courage. And that was certainly part of it, but the more important, more significant point was that He was confronting these false and worldly ideas *in himself*. Indeed, He didn't need the scribes and Pharisees or even the devil himself to tempt Him, since He had His own material heredity to do that. But between that and the other, outside threats, we read, "the *whole* of the Lord's life in the world from earliest childhood consisted in *constant* temptation and *constant* victory." Here's why:

"All temptation is an attack against the love present in a person, the degree of temptation depending on the degree of that love. If love is not attacked there is no temptation. Destroying another person's love is destroying his very life, for his love is his life. The Lord's life was love towards the whole human race; indeed it was so great and of such a nature as to be nothing other than pure love. Against this life of His, temptations were directed constantly, and this was happening, as has been stated, from earliest childhood through to His last hour in the world" (AC #1690).

So the simple experience of worldly pleasure, or the fallacies of worldly appearances would have been enough to challenge the Lord's commitment to give His life for others. And especially as He grew in wisdom and understanding the *doubt* that the human race even *could* be saved must have been overwhelming. And yet as He grew in the knowledge and perception of the truths in the Word He became more and more fully prepared to complete this work.

We're not told how long the Lord stayed in Egypt but we do know from secular accounts that Herod didn't live long after he issued his decree. Evil, as we know, brings its own consequences. In any case, there's good reason to suppose that the knowledge and insight the Lord was gaining in Egypt had at least something to do with the elimination of the threat posed by Herod.

So, being advised again by an angel of the Lord in a dream, Joseph "arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel" (Matt. 2:21). He might have gone back to Judea, but fearing Herod's son, Archelaus, and being warned *again* in a dream, he took the family to Nazareth, about a three day's journey to the north in Galilee, where they remained.

Now this is interesting. Dreams in the stories of the Word certainly communicate information, but especially in dreams at night the information may not be understood or perceived clearly. So all of Joseph's dreams represent at best a general idea: go here, go there, or be careful! – but the details are left for Joseph to work out. So he himself appears to represent the understanding we are all given as we take the responsibility to work out what is best from what little we know. And the fact that the family went to Galilee instead of Judea is also deeply symbolic, since Galilee was home to many Gentiles who had little or no understanding of Jewish teachings. Of course there were synagogues throughout the country, but even there the Jews were not so steeped in the old culture and traditions as they were in Jerusalem. So rather than *learning* from them we read that "Jesus went about all Galilee, *teaching* [them], *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, *and healing* all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matt. 4:23). In other words, He was taken to Galilee not just for fear of Archelaus but so that He could begin His ministry among the people who would be most receptive to His teaching.

That He could do this even as a boy is clear from the incident recorded in Luke, when on one of their many visits to Jerusalem He was found in the temple, in the midst of the teachers there at

only 12 years of age amazing even them with His understanding and His answers to their questions. Mary and Joseph had been worried about Him, but when they found Him He startled them by saying, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” No, actually; no they didn’t. His life was a total mystery to them – as it was to many others during His adult ministry.

For example, one time when Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, He “went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’” (John 7:15). Little did they know He had been studying since He was a Child in Egypt! He just hadn’t studied with *them*, and so they didn’t respect Him – or what He had to say.

But just as Moses grew up in Egypt, well trained in all the knowledge and disciplines of leadership so that He could bring his people out of natural captivity into the land of Israel, so the Lord grew up steeped in the knowledge and disciplines of the Word itself so that He could lead His people – all of us – out of spiritual captivity into a life of genuine charity and faith... if we are willing. And just as Moses and the people of Israel celebrated the Lord’s victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, so WE can celebrate the Lord’s victory in all His temptations from the hells, bringing US through the challenges we face today in following the teachings of His Word. – Not that Egypt represents hell, but it is the compelling influence of knowledge alone, without real understanding or commitment to spiritual life. We need what Egypt represents; we need knowledge as a foundation for all that follows – which is why the Children of Israel went there in the first place during the seven years of famine, and why the Lord went there as a Child. But we can’t afford to let ourselves get stuck there. Just as the Israelites became slaves to Pharaoh, we can become slaves to knowledge, thinking, for instance, that we can’t commit to the Lord until we’re satisfied beyond a doubt that everything He taught is absolutely true.

Really?! Who are we to think we can ever know enough to determine the value of the Word on our own? Of course it has to make some kind of sense to us or it would be meaningless. But it will only make sense to us when we spend time in it, and learn it, and apply it to our lives, *just as the Lord did* from childhood right through His ministry in the world. And like the Lord we have to apply it to our own lives, not just to those around us, as misguided as they might be. Only then will He be able to give us the understanding and perception we need to believe it, and to enter into a useful, satisfying spiritual life drawn from it. Only then will we be truly free – free of misconceptions, free of apprehensions, free of pretensions and plain old-fashioned foolishness. Only then will we be able to follow the Lord where He is leading us, and where we can be with Him in confidence and peace (John 14:3, 27 & 16:33).

Amen.

Lessons: *Matthew 2:13-23*  
Children’s Talk? Key points from this sermon – for the New Year

*Exodus 15:1-7, 11-13*  
*The Doctrine of Faith #2-3a, 5-6, 11a & 12*