

**TAKE THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER AND FLEE TO EGYPT – Biblical  
Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Mt 2.13-15;19-23***

***Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."***

***But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."***

The promised land has been transformed into a land of slavery and death, from which it is necessary to escape. The evangelist anticipates, in the episode of Jesus' infancy, those tragic events that will develop during the whole of Jesus' existence. Let's see the text.

"Now when they had departed", they are talking about the three kings, "*..behold, an angel of the Lord*", here again is this formula, that is God. God, when he appears before mankind, He is never presented as a divine reality, as Himself, as the Lord, but always in this way 'an angel of the Lord', but it is always the Lord when he enters into contact with humanity.

This angel of the Lord intervenes three times in this Gospel to announce the arrival of Jesus to Joseph, to protect Him, as in this case, from the homicidal intent of Herod and then to confirm Him at the moment of the resurrection.

*“...appeared to Joseph in a dream,”* the Lord appears in dream to prophets, therefore Joseph qualifies in some way as a prophet, *“..and said, « Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt»”* Here is the promised land transformed into a land of slavery. The people fled from Egypt to enter into the promised land, but now they must flee from the promised land to find refuge in Egypt again.

*“«...and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. »”* The news is likely. We know that Herod, the illegitimate king, suspect of anything that would take away the crown, does not hesitate to eliminate members of his own family, even to kill three sons, the last only a few days before dying. Therefore the news is plausible

But it is the reply of the power to the gift of God, as the Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, Herod tries to kill Jesus. The evangelist describes the flight of Joseph as the flight to the Jewish people from Egypt the night of Easter. In fact, *“ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night..”* like the night of the liberation, *“..and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, «Out of Egypt I called my son. »”*

Therefore the evangelist uses this prophesy of Hosea to show how the action of the Lord always protects his people when they find themselves in dangerous situations. *“..when Herod died..”* here again the angel of the Lord returns, *“..... an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, «Rise, take the child and his mother... »”*, and we expect that the angel will say to Joseph *“Return to the land of Israel”*

And he says to him *“«...go to the land of Israel,»”*, and we will see why. *“« ...for those who sought the child's life are dead»”*. The evangelist takes this last expression from the book of Exodus where one reads *“And the LORD said to Moses in Midian : « Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead»”*.

Therefore the evangelist presents Jesus as a new Moses, the new liberator of His people. But why here does the evangelist, as well as the quotation from Exodus, say that those that wanted to kill the child are dead when really it is one, Herod, that sought to kill the child? Because the evangelist wants to anticipate that which will be the actions of the religious institutions against Jesus. Therefore in ‘those’ there are the Pharisees, the high priests, the elders, all the religious elite that will let loose against Jesus.

*“And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”* Here also we expect ‘return to the land of Israel’, in fact the evangelist writes that Joseph, with the child and his wife, do not return to the land of Israel, but go. To make an entrance like the people when they entered into the promised land. Therefore there is already an anticipation of that which will be the liberation, the new exodus that Jesus will accomplish.

*“But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod...”* At the death of Herod the kingdom was divided between three sons. To Archelaus went the Judaea with the Samaria, and the Idumaea, to Herod Antipa the Galilee with the Peraea, and to Filippo all the north east of Lake Tiberiade. Well, this Archelaus was a bloodthirsty person. He began with the massacre of a good three million citizens, *“.. he was afraid to go there, and*

*being warned in a dream..*”, here again is the action of the Lord as always to guide Joseph, “... *he withdrew to the district of Galilee.*” The region most ill-famed of Israel, a region so ill-famed that it had no name.

While the Judaea took the name of Judah, one of the patriarchs of the twelve tribes that had made up Israel, the expression Galilee comes from the contempt with which Isaiah, in chapter 8 indicates the region of the pagans. In Hebrew , Isaiah writes Geli, that means ‘district, territory’ of the pagans. From Geli came the name Galilee, therefore indicating the semi-pagan zone, a zone far from the religious center.

And not only, “ *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth,*”. An ill-famed city. We know from the Gospel of John, the wonders of Natanaele when they say that Jesus comes from Nazareth, and he surprisingly says "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?".

*“..that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: «He shall be called...»”, and the evangelist does not write ‘Nazareno’, therefore an inhabitant of Nazareth, but he writes ‘Nazarene’, and this term is important, because with this term the evangelist re groups three meanings:*

- Nezer, meaning ‘offspring, offshoot’ from the prophesy of Isaiah al chapter 11 “There come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, shall and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” Jesse is David’s father
- Nazir, meaning consacrated
- And naturally Nazareth, the place of origin of Jesus.