

THE HOLY FAMILY– 29th December 2019

RISE, TAKE THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, AND FLEE TO EGYPT– Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 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, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The evangelist Matthew is a great theologian and he is probably the scribe who, as Jesus said, brings out from his treasures new and old things. In presenting the figure of Joseph, the father of Jesus, with great skill the evangelist merges in this personage great liberators of the history of Israel: Joseph, the son of Jacob, the one who had been sold by the brothers, who saved his family by bringing him to Egypt, and Moses, the great liberator, who saved his people by taking them away from Egypt.

But let's see what the evangelist writes in his gospel in chapter 2, 13 *"Now when they had departed,"* . meaning the Kings- *"...behold, an angel of the Lord"* the angel of the Lord enters into action: a formula that indicates not an angel sent by the Lord, but God himself when he enters into communication with man. In this Gospel this appears in three important moments: to announce the life of Jesus, to defend it, as we see now, from the murderous plots of King Herod, and, at the time of the resurrection, to confirm that life, when it comes from God, is indestructible.

"..behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream" here the evangelist speaks of Joseph's dream as the dreams of the patriarch, the man of dreams, as it is written in the book of Genesis. *"..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."* Why is this? Herod was an illegitimate king, he had no Jewish blood in his veins and was obsessed that someone could take away his throne, to the point that he went so far as to kill a dozen family members and even three children, the last of which a few days before he died . But the evangelist, in the figure of Herod, wants to depict that of the pharaoh who ordered the massacre of all the male children of the

Jewish people and, by divine intervention, Moses was saved.

“And he rose and took the child and his mother by night...” like the night of Easter, the night of liberation, “.. and departed to Egypt...” So, just as Joseph the patriarch brought his family to safety in Egypt, so did Joseph the father of Jesus. And the evangelist continues *“But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,...”* and here the evangelist does nothing but literally take the quotation from the book of Exodus chapter 4,19., of what the Lord said to Moses in Midian – *“Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead. So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt.”* It is exactly what the evangelist writes now *“Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.”*

In the land of Israel there should be no problems, maybe, *“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 ...”* when Herod the Great died, the region was dismembered and divided: Judea, Samaria and Idumea fell to Archelaus, Herod Antipas, the king who later saw the deeds of Jesus, Galilee and Perea; went to the other son, Filippo, the whole part to the east and north of the lake.

“Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod,..” to reign in place of his father meant that he was a murderer like his father; in fact Archelaus began his reign with a massacre of three thousand Jews, *“...he was afraid to go there”*. Power is always a killer. In the face of God's gifts, power always responds with terror. *“..and being warned in a dream..”* Joseph's dreams return again *“..he withdrew..”* and here the evangelist begins to present the light that shines in the darkness. In fact *“..to the district of Galilee.”* While Judea owes its name to Judah, one of the patriarchs of Israel, this region in the north, on the border with the pagans, was so despised that the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 8, wishing to indicate it said "The district of the gentiles", that is the pagan district. District in Hebrew is called galil (phonetic), from which comes Galilee. Therefore an obscure zone. *“ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth,..”* Never mentioned in the texts of the Bible, it did not enjoy a good name. In John's Gospel we know Nathanael's sceptical response when they tell him that Jesus comes from Nazareth and he says *“But can anything good come from Nazareth?”*. So the adventure of Jesus is born into the dark world, it is the light that shines in the darkness.

“..so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled..” and here we see the great ability of Matthew, the great scribe and theologian, *“.. that he would be called a Nazarene.”* Literally the evangelist writes Nazoreo (phonetic) because it merges three different terms: one, the first, is naser (phonetic), which means "the virgulto", and is taken from chapter 11 of the prophet Isaiah, in the prophecy *“A virgulto will sprout from his roots ”*, from the roots of the father of David; the other is the term nazir (phonetic), which means "consecrated", the man who lives for God, and finally of course the name of Nazareth. So this page is a great masterpiece of literature, theology and spirituality and the meaning is: God is always at the side of his people and God will always stir up new liberators of his family.

Letteralmente l'evangelista scrive *Nazoreo* (fonetico) perché fonde tre termini diversi: uno, il primo, è *neser* (fonetico), che significa "il virgulto", e viene preso dal capitolo 11 del profeta Isaia, nella profezia "Un virgulto spunterà dalle sue radici", dalle radici del padre di Davide; l'altro è il termine *nazir* (fonetico), che significa "consacrato", l'uomo che vive per Dio, e infine naturalmente il nome di Nazareth. Quindi questa pagina è un grande capolavoro di letteratura, di teologia e di spiritualità e il significato è: Dio sta sempre a fianco del suo popolo e Dio sempre susciterà nuovi liberatori della sua famiglia.