

*Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches
12.28.2025, First Sunday after Christmas, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.*

"The Company of Joseph"

Matthew 2:13–23

Let us pray: Merciful Lord, as we hear the words of Matthew's Gospel today, grant us the anointing to understand the Scriptures as You granted it to Matthew. Pour out upon us the faith of Joseph, who protected the baby Jesus and His mother. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

A few days ago, we joyfully celebrated Christmas. Now a new journey has begun with the baby Jesus, who has come to live among us. But this journey is not only filled with joy; it also includes suffering. The joy of Jesus' birth was brief. Soon, there was a plot to kill the child, and the family had to flee.

When we know the Bible, our past, present, and future begin to make sense. All of Scripture tells the story of God's salvation, and the highest point of that story is Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus includes the lives of all God's children, throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

In the four Gospels, however, only a few lines are written about Jesus' childhood. This is because God records only what is necessary for our salvation story. In the Gospel of Luke, we read mostly about the role of Mary. But Matthew is the only Gospel that gives us a clear account of Jesus' father, Joseph.

Why does Matthew emphasize Joseph's role? Matthew's Gospel was written for a Jewish audience, and it focuses on Jesus as the promised Messiah, the King who comes from the line of King David. Joseph was a descendant of David. Although he was not Jesus' biological father, his role as Jesus' legal father was extremely important.

It is crucial that we meet Christ in every part of Scripture. And depending on the passage, the grace we receive is different each time. Today, through this passage, I pray that we may receive the spirit of Joseph, the anointing of Joseph.

After the wise men worshiped the child and left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you." The word "rise" means to act at once, without delay.

Joseph did exactly as he was told. As soon as he woke up, even though it was still night, he rose and took the child and his mother and left for Egypt. The journey to the edge of Egypt was about at least 75 miles. How could he begin such a long journey so immediately?

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Imagine Joseph waking his tired wife, gently explaining his dream and why they had to leave right away. Picture him carefully packing their things so the baby would not wake up, and then leading his family out into the night.

Joseph had already received a revelation in the first dream from the angel of the Lord that this child was Immanuel, God with us. He must have kept thinking about this in his heart. He likely believed that he had been given the mission to protect God who had come as a human being. That is why he was able to obey immediately when he heard the angel's words in the second dream.

In today's passage, notice how Matthew speaks. He does not say "Joseph's child" or "Joseph's wife." Instead, he repeatedly says, "the child and his mother." This phrase appears four times. It shows that Joseph's role was to be the protector of Christ and of the mother who gave birth to Him.

The words that gave Joseph the strength to obey right away were these: "Stay there until I tell you." This meant that God Himself was planning and guiding Joseph's journey. It was also a promise that God would continue to protect and lead him. So Joseph and his family stayed in Egypt until God gave further instructions.

Why Egypt? In God's redemptive history, Egypt often represents the world. It can mean the unbelieving world that God's people are called to leave behind. But at the same time, it is also the world that needs salvation, the place where we are sent to bring the good news of God's grace.

The fact that the baby Jesus left for Egypt at night points to this truth: Christ came as light into a world covered in the darkness of sin. Without knowing Jesus, we live in the night. Into such dark lives, Christ comes as light, even though He comes in weakness, as a baby. In the book of Genesis, Joseph being sold as a slave and taken to Egypt points forward to this very life of Jesus.

Matthew says that this event fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea 11:1: "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" For the people of Israel, Egypt was, in history, both a place of refuge and a place where they were prepared to become a nation. After Jacob's family moved there, they grew and became many. Later, they became slaves in Egypt, and God raised up Moses to lead them out in the Exodus.

The baby Jesus going to Egypt shows that He came to complete the Exodus, which is the clearest picture and the most powerful drama of salvation. What is salvation? It means leaving Egypt, leaving a world that does not know God. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Matthew sees that the

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history of Israel, God's children, is repeated in the life of Jesus, the Child of God. And what we discover in return is this: our own lives, as God's children today, are also reflected in the life of the Son of God.

When the baby Jesus comes, there is joy—but what else happens? Martyrdom takes place. As John 1 tells us, the light came into the darkness, but the darkness did not recognize it. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.

Because the wise men did not return to Herod, he realized he had been deceived and became furious. He sent soldiers and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding area who were two years old and under, based on the time he had learned from the wise men. The early Church Fathers called these children the first martyrs, those who died in place of Christ.

Matthew says this also fulfilled Jeremiah 31:15: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." In Jeremiah's time, this prophecy spoke of the sorrow when the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell, and the people were taken into exile in Babylon. Ramah was a town of the tribe of Benjamin and was close to Bethlehem. It was a gathering place when the people of Benjamin were taken into captivity. Nearby was the tomb of Rachel.

Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was seen as a representative mother of Israel. She died while giving birth to Benjamin, so in a sense, she lost her child. Jeremiah's prophecy pointed not only to the Babylonian exile, but also to the death of the children of Bethlehem.

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt. This was the third dream. The angel said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." Joseph obeyed. He rose and took the child and his mother, and returned to the land of Israel.

But when Joseph heard that Archelaus, who was just as cruel as his father Herod, was ruling in Judea, he was afraid to go there. Our God sees all our situations, our worries, and our fears. Once again, God spoke to Joseph in a dream. This was the fourth and final dream. So Joseph went to a town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee, in the north.

We may wonder why God sent Jesus to grow up in Galilee, a remote and humble region, in such a small and unimportant town. Jerusalem or Bethlehem might seem like better places to raise a child. In Luke chapter 1, we learn that Nazareth was actually the hometown of Joseph and Mary, so settling there may have been a natural choice.

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But Matthew says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene." Matthew does not name a single prophet, but speaks of "the prophets." Matthew clearly knew the Old Testament very well. Yet, no matter how carefully we search the Hebrew Scriptures, we do not find any prophet who directly says that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene.

The early Church Fathers understood this not as a direct quotation, but as a summary of many prophets' messages as a whole. The Church Fathers found a key in Isaiah 11:1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." Jesse was the father of David, and Jesus is the shoot that comes from that line. A shoot is small, weak, and easily overlooked. Another word used here is "branch." The Hebrew word for branch is *netzer*. The early Christians saw a word connection between *netzer* and Nazareth. The Jewish people often used wordplay like this, connecting similar-sounding words to make a deeper point.

To be called a Nazarene meant to be despised. In John 1:46, Nathanael says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was a poor and dry town, often invaded by foreign armies. It was known as a place with little hope.

Nazareth points to our real life today. Jesus is the King, yet He humbled Himself and stepped into our hard, tiring, and tear-filled reality.

Under the care of Mary and Joseph, Jesus grows up in Nazareth. Mary represents our inner spirit. Joseph represents our outer person. When Jesus is conceived and born in our spirit, our outer person, like Joseph, must protect and care for our spirit and for Christ within us. This means living in obedience to God's saving plan.

The angel of the Lord speaks to us through the Word of God. As we read and meditate on Scripture, there are moments when the Holy Spirit speaks to us in a special way. At times, God may even speak through dreams.

We are all Joseph. When we receive direction from God's Word, may we rise immediately, obey, and serve God in his work of salvation. May the anointing of Joseph be poured out on all of us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray: Father, when Jesus came to dwell within us, we could no longer live as the world lives. Thank You for granting us the privilege of taking part in the saving work of Jesus Christ. As Joseph carried and led Jesus to the places He was meant to go, help us to fulfill our role faithfully. Open our ears to hear Your Word clearly, and pour out upon us the Spirit of obedience, so that we may respond at once. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.