



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sermon by Pr. Seyward Ask

Sermon for December 28, 2025 | Matthew 2:13-23

The First Sunday of Christmas.

Our Gospel reading comes from St Matthew, the 2nd chapter, beginning with the 13th verse:

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, 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.” ¹⁴ Then Joseph^[a] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” ¹⁶

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,^[b] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.^[c] ¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ Then Joseph^[d] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

Sermon:

Although it was only a few days ago—and although we are still technically in the season of Christmas—for most of us, Christmas is already over. The presents have been opened.

The big meals have been eaten. The cookies are mostly gone. We’ve spent time with family

and friends, maybe played games, watched holiday movies, sang a few carols, or just sat around talking. The decorations might still be up, and the lights might stay on until after New Year's, but emotionally and practically, the big celebration has wrapped up.

Growing up, my family celebrated Christmas three times. Christmas Eve was spent at church and then at home. On Christmas Day, we drove to my Grandma Janice's house and celebrated with my mom's side of the family. We stayed there for a few days, and then we packed up again and headed to my Grandma Lo and Grandpa Matt's to celebrate with my dad's side. By the time all the Christmas celebrations were done, it was almost time for New Year's Eve. It was busy and chaotic and exhausting—and I loved it. I loved seeing all that family, even if it meant a lot of driving and very little downtime.

But in today's Gospel, the celebration doesn't linger at all. For the Holy Family, there was no extended Christmas season. No going back home to show off the baby to relatives. No long stretch of joy and calm. By the time we catch up with them in Matthew's Gospel, the mood has shifted dramatically. Jesus is no longer a newborn. He's probably somewhere under the age of two. And instead of shepherds and songs and wonder, we're met with fear, danger, and flight.

Joseph is warned in a dream that Herod is looking for the child—not to worship him, but to kill him. And so, in the middle of the night, Joseph gathers Mary and Jesus and runs. They flee their home. They leave their country. They become refugees, seeking safety in Egypt. This is not the Christmas story we like to linger on.

Because it messes with the tidy version of Christmas we prefer—the one with silent nights and peaceful hearts and everything wrapped up neatly with a bow. The angels sang about good news and peace on earth, but almost immediately, the world pushes back. There is still violence. There is still fear. There is still cruelty. There is still the abuse of power. Herod responds to the threat of losing control with devastating violence. And if we're honest, that sounds painfully familiar.

We've just come through Christmas. Maybe it was joyful. Maybe it was complicated. Maybe it was a little bit of both. And yet, if we open a newspaper or scroll the news, the world hasn't magically changed. There is still war. Still injustice. Still suffering. Still grief. Still fear.

So we find ourselves asking the same question people have been asking since that very first Christmas: What happened to the good news? What happened to the peace?

The answer, I think, is that God's kingdom has come—but it is not yet complete. The incarnation is real. God truly enters the world in Jesus. But God does not override human

freedom. God does not force peace. Instead, God invites us into it. The angels weren't lying. Peace on earth is still the promise. But it's a promise we are called to help live into. And that's where Joseph comes in.

Joseph often gets pushed to the background of the Christmas story. He doesn't speak. He doesn't sing. He doesn't get poetic lines like Mary. But when you look closely, Joseph carries an enormous amount of responsibility—and trust. Nothing about this journey has been easy for him. First, he learns that his fiancée is pregnant before they're married. He chooses compassion over shame. Then there's the exhausting trip to Bethlehem, the lack of shelter, the birth under less-than-ideal circumstances.

And just when things might have started to settle down—just when life might have begun to feel normal—Joseph is warned again. “Get up. Take the child and his mother. Run.” And Joseph does. Again and again in this story, Joseph listens. He trusts. He acts. He doesn't have all the answers. He doesn't get guarantees. He doesn't get a clear timeline. But he moves his feet anyway.

Trusting God often looks less like certainty and more like courage. It often means letting go of comfort, familiarity, and security. But one of the quiet promises of this story is that God does not stay behind when we move. God goes with us—into Egypt, into uncertainty, into the places we never planned to be.

Later, the letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus a pioneer—one who goes ahead, opening the way for others. But before Jesus ever leads us, Joseph leads Jesus. He shows us what faithful response looks like in an imperfect, dangerous world.

As we stand on the edge of a new year, still wrapped in Christmas light but fully aware of the world's darkness, this story reminds us that faith doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. Faith means listening for God's voice, trusting that God is still at work, and taking the next right step—even when it's hard.

Christmas doesn't end with the birth of Jesus. It continues in the choices we make to protect life, to seek justice, to listen deeply, and to move when love calls us to move. May we, like Joseph, trust enough to act. May we believe the good news—and live it.

Amen.