

## New Year's Eve

Text: **Matthew 2:13 - 23 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup>When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup>So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup>where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." <sup>16</sup>When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup>Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup>"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." <sup>19</sup>After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup>and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup>So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, <sup>23</sup>and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."



### ***Theme: The Lord's Hand Is with His People***

It was a week ago that we gathered together to celebrate the gift of our Savior. We thought of the manger and sang the lullaby "Away in a Manger. Christ often pictured so sweetly in the manger with Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and even the animals looking on. Christmas is a time that is full of joy and hope.

Our text tonight almost seems to destroy that hope. Herod wants to kill the baby, so Mary, Joseph, and the Child quickly flee to Egypt, and every boy in Bethlehem who is 2 years old and younger is killed.

Tonight many people will be wishing each other a happy new year. New Year's Eve is another one of those happy times. We look forward to the new year with anticipation and hope. But soon for many of us things will come along that try to destroy our hope and enthusiasm for the new year: sickness, heartbreak, worry, financial distress or conflict.

The beginning of my sermon might not seem very happy, but the good news that I want to share with you today is that the Lord's hand is always with His people, even when His hand gives suffering. His hand will always protect us and deliver us from all evil.

#### **I. God's hand gives suffering at times.**

It was that way for Jesus. Imagine how joyful Mary and Joseph must have felt when the Magi came from a distant land, worshiped Mary's Son, and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But as soon as they left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. He told him to get up and take the child to Egypt for Herod will search for the child and kill him. Herod had told the Magi to return to him after they found the child, so that he could go and worship Him also. But Herod didn't want to worship the Christ Child. He wanted to kill Him. Herod was paranoid about anyone else, who might take his kingdom. Because of Herod's vicious plans, the Christ child had to flee to Egypt.

But this was not something that just happened out of the blue. About 750 BC God had prophesied through the prophet Hosea, "Out of Egypt I called my Son." 1400 years earlier He even prophesied through the Seer Balaam, "God brought Him out of Egypt." (Num 24:8) Herod had hardened his heart against this child, and the devil tried to use Herod to destroy the Christ child. But it was God's

hand that allowed it all to happen. Right from the start, the Father allowed His Son to bear the cross. He had to flee to Egypt, the land where God's people were once slaves. Already as a baby, He was despised and rejected.

But what is most troublesome in this whole account is the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem. You can imagine the grief and tears that flowed in Bethlehem that day. Dozens of innocent young boys were slaughtered by a murderous madman, who happened to be king. But even that was something that God's hand allowed, which was prophesied in the Old Testament through the prophet Jeremiah, "*A voice is heard in Rama, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.*" There had been so much joy in Bethlehem. The shepherds had just shared the good news that the Savior was born. Magi from very far away had just come to this village in great splendor. But now there were so many families that were grieving the loss of their children. But yet again, it was the Lord's hand which allowed it.

Still today, the Lord's hand allows suffering to come to His people. Revelation 12 pictures the devil as a dragon that pursues the church until she flees into the desert. That has been the history of the church since its beginning. The congregation in Jerusalem was so persecuted by Saul, that it had to flee Jerusalem and was scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The early Christians underwent severe persecutions from the Roman Empire. In most of the Middle East millions of Christians were killed in the Moslem conquest, and Christians still suffer greatly in Middle Eastern countries today. Even in Europe governments persecuted God's people. Many Christians sought peace and religious freedom in the new world. In 2011 we will celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the CFW Walther. He and our forefathers in the Missouri Synod were people who came here because of religious persecution. Today we see more and more, even in our own country, that the state is not so kindly disposed to the church as it once was. Who listens to what the church has to say on any moral issues today? When it comes to God, people don't mind if we talk about God in a generic way, but they don't always like it when we talk about Jesus. All these things just didn't happen, God's hand has allowed them to happen.

Even in our personal lives come sickness, heartbreak, worry, financial distress, conflict, and even death. Again it doesn't just happen. God's hand allows it. St. Peter wrote, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you may participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.*" (1 Peter 4:12,13) What Peter writes there is very important for us Christians to understand. Our suffering is no longer because we are sinners. Suffering for the Christian isn't because God is punishing us. Our punishment was laid on Christ, when He was nailed to the cross. What we bear are the crosses we have when we follow Him. It is God's hand which allows such crosses to come into our lives.

II. God's hand also protects us in the time of suffering.

The Father protected His Son Jesus Christ. Joseph was warned in a dream that they should flee. He did, and the Christ-child was saved. God seems to have used the visit of the Magi to prepare for this. Those gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were worth a lot of money, and probably are what Mary and Joseph lived off of in Egypt until they could return home.

God's protecting hand is still with His people today. Joseph was told in the dream that he should flee to Egypt. But we normally see afterward how God has led us, and how He has protected us. If we were to look at how we have planned our lives, and how they have gone, things probably went far differently than we planned. Here and there, there have been big road blocks to our plans, and our lives had to take new directions. In eternity the maze that our lives have taken will first make sense, but already now we can get a glimpse of how God's protecting hand has been with us. Even when things had to take a new direction, it was for the best, even when pain and suffering came in the way, God worked that for our best. The Bible doesn't tell us any more about the grieving families in Bethlehem. But I believe that for those who trusted in the Lord, God found a way to give the comfort

and peace that only He can give.

Psalm 121 gives us wonderful comfort in God's protecting hand in any circumstance where it says,

*I lift up my eyes to the hills--  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of Heaven and earth...  
The Lord will keep you from all harm--  
He will watch over your life;  
The Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore. (Ps. 121:1,2,7,8)*

God hand is always with us, protecting us from evil.

III. In the end God's hand will deliver us from all evil.

King Herod died. In fact, he died a horrible, painful death in which He was eaten by worms. God had judge him. Our Lord Jesus Christ also died a horrible death on the cross. But He rose from the dead and was exalted to the right hand of the Father, so that His name is above every name, that at His name every knee shall bow. The same will also happen to our Lord's people. Those innocent children in Bethlehem became the first martyrs. There was great grief in Bethlehem, but our Lord received them into His glory.

We go through many crosses in this life, but they lead us on the narrow path, that leads to eternal life. Our crosses along the way only strengthen our hope in the glory that will be revealed to us. When that blessed day comes, God will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away. (Rev. 21:4) Our tears will turn to psalms and praises. All the crosses we bore in this life will be our trophies, and for eternity we will praise our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, that His hand has led us through suffering to the eternal joy and glory of His Father.

May God grant us that peace to know that His guiding hand gives us times of blessing and gives us strength when we bear our crosses. It's that peace to recognize that His almighty hand is always with us, which will give us true hope as we enter this new year

Amen.

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