

## **Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 God is in control! Christmas 1 January 1, 2017**

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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father who guides our eternal destiny through our Savior Jesus. God's Word to give us direction and confidence in Him is written in Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23.

These are Your words heavenly Father to help us trust in You in all situations. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Most people like surprises, as long as they turn out well. In December 2015 a woman contestant was declared the winner of the "Miss Universe" pageant. She received her crown and began her waves to the crowd, only to be stopped by an official and have her crown given to someone else. The mc had announced the wrong name. The woman went from honor to embarrassment in minutes! Mary and Joseph also had double surprises within hours of each other. They had been living in Bethlehem for some time after Jesus was born. They were suddenly surprised by wisemen whom God had led to Bethlehem by a star. The men quickly honored Jesus as a king with praise and costly gifts. Then they immediately left for home! That same evening Joseph was told by an angel in a dream to leave Bethlehem immediately to save Jesus' life. How could two such opposite things happen in one day? God had the answer. And we'll learn that:

### **God is in control!**

**First, God has a way of providing.** It would have been nice for Jesus' family to stay in Bethlehem and not flee for their lives. But, God knew better! Joseph was told, "*Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you...*" (v.13) What kind of questions might Joseph have had for God? Wouldn't it be dangerous for them to travel when Jesus was so young? God's answer was that it would be more dangerous to stay in Bethlehem for Herod was about to send his troops to kill all young male children. (v.13) Joseph may have wondered how the family would be provided for. But, God had just given to them through the wisemen a small fortune of gold, incense, and myrrh. They would have plenty for the trip and to stay in Egypt. Why go to Egypt? There were many reasons. 1. Egypt was not in Herod's jurisdiction. He could not harm Jesus there. 2. There were large Jewish settlements in Egypt. The family would be welcomed to stay and blend in with other Jews. 3. This experience of the young Jesus fleeing for his life and living humbly was a pattern for Him: from Egypt, to Nazareth, His ministry travels, the cross, and the grave. Jesus' coming up from Egypt was God's plan. Matthew wrote, "*So was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'*" (v.15) Hosea 11:1 described the Children of Israel when they were led by Moses out of Egypt to the Promise Land to fulfill God's purpose.

Israel's return from Egypt was a type of the coming Christ whom God would send from Egypt to the land of Israel to accomplish His greater purpose. All these incidents must have given Joseph and Mary many fearful days, but they could later see that it was part of God's saving plan. Just as God provided the godly family with means to move to a place of safety in Egypt, so He would provide a place for them to return. Joseph had considered moving to Judea or Jerusalem where Jesus could have the best education. But, that was not part of God's plan. They "*went and lived in the town of Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'*" (v.23) To be called a Nazarene at Jesus' time meant that you were lowly and appearing to have little significance, which is how the coming Christ was often described by Old Testament prophets like Isaiah or Zechariah.

There is one more question which Joseph may have asked of God, and we may ask it, too. If Herod was so evil, why didn't God just end his life? Why did God make His Son run away instead of stopping the evil one that sought His life? The answer is not given in our verses. But, we have some general ideas. King Herod's time of grace to repent was not complete. At Herod's death, his son began ruling and he was worse than his father, slaughtering 3,000 people at one time. That's why Joseph returned another province. The other answer is that God tests His people. Joseph and Jesus would need wait patiently and trust in God.

Herod would die within a year of a very painful intestinal disease. But the young Jesus would continue to live humbly following His heavenly Father's plan. Throughout Jesus' life people would try to manipulate Him, drive Him out of their cities, and even try to kill Him. Yet, in each temptation Jesus did not sin, so He would become a perfect sacrifice. When God's time was right, Jesus was tried by sinful men, humiliated, and executed on a cross. But, the surprise was on Jesus' enemies. He rose from death and received from God the glory He deserved. Some day Herod and the others who rejected Jesus will face Him as the Lord of all. Their pride will turn to total shame as they will be sent away to eternal suffering in hell.

**Second, how do we respond to this good news of God?** First, we are to believe that God has a plan for believers for good according to His purpose! Think of Daniel. He prayed for the nation that he served. For doing that, he was thrown into a den of hungry lions. His enemies who lied about him to get him in trouble were surprised when Daniel was pulled from the lions' den unharmed and they were thrown in for their wickedness. From the experience the King praised Daniel's God in a letter to all the empire's provinces. So, only God knows the whole plan for each of us. We can trust that as we pray and seek His will through His Word God will work out things for good. We will need patience and faith just as Joseph and Jesus did.

We can be sure that God's blessings will follow in various ways in this life like with the wisemen providing for Joseph to travel. We can also be sure that where God is blessing, the devil will try to stop it, like he tried to do through King Herod. Here we must be watchful that he doesn't harm Christ in our hearts. Heaven will be completely different. Talk about a dramatic surprise! The world considers Christians as unimportant, like coming from Nazareth. But, on the Last Day God will declare us to be His children, heirs of eternal life, and we will rule with Christ! Paul wrote, *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...."* (Romans 8:16-17)

Also, we can gain understanding. When we face trouble like Joseph, we see from this lesson that God always provides. He provided a treasure for Jesus' family to move to Egypt. He will provide what we need when He knows we need it for His good purpose. The Lord sent an angel to tell Joseph what to do and where to go. God gives us His Word to guide us. What blessings await us as we study His Word! It promises that His angels have charge over us, to keep us in all our ways. Even if we can't avoid trouble like Joseph, we have God's assurance of His help: *"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10)

If Joseph wouldn't have trusted God and he had stayed in Bethlehem there would have been serious trouble for Jesus! But Joseph acted by faith and did what God told him. *"He got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt...."* (v.14) Would we have as bold a faith to follow God's leading? The more we hear God's Word and understand it, the more God will give us strength to do just that! Whether our days have good or bad surprises for us, we can be sure that God is in control. Trust in His promises! Listen to His Word and follow Him! Amen.