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The Preservation of the Christ
Matthew 2.12-23
Series: God With Us
December 18, 2022
The Village Church at Shell Point

I. **Behind the Scenes**

- A. Can you identify with Job?
 - 1. When we think of Job, we think suffering
 - a. Job went through an unbelievable amount of suffering
 - 2. His sons and daughters were having a feast at the eldest brother's house
 - a. While they were there, the family's servants were going about their business planting and feeding their animals
 - b. A neighboring tribe struck down the servants, killed them; took their animals
 - c. At about the same time lightning struck the family's shepherds, and the shepherds and the sheep were all killed
 - d. And just about the same time as that, another neighboring tribe raided the camels, killed the servants
 - e. And as if that weren't enough, a great wind came and blew down the eldest brother's house, killing all the sons and daughters who had gathered for the feast
 - f. So in one day, Job lost his animals, his servants, his children, and his family's home
 - 3. But the Job experience wasn't finished
 - a. Not long after that disaster, Job got sick
 - b. He was covered with painful sores, from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head
 - c. It was like shingles – not just in a part of his body, but all over his body
 - d. And on top of that, his dear wife was not so dear
 - e. "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" she told him
- B. Maybe you think you can identify with Job as a result of the last few months
 - 1. Maybe the losses you've sustained – and many have sustained substantial losses – remind you of Job's losses
 - 2. Jean and I have had our losses – though not nearly as much as many
 - a. But yet someone mentioned to us that we are going through our Job moment
 - 3. But truthfully, for almost everyone in SW Florida who went through Ian and its aftermath, nothing really compares with Job's losses
 - a. Children

- b. Livestock
 - c. Business
 - d. Servants
 - e. Houses
 - f. Health
 - 4. It's true he didn't die
 - a. But for him, death would have been easier than to experience the pain of his whole-body shingles
 - 5. So while we might be tempted to think we identify with Job, for most of us, our sufferings are mild by comparison with Job
- C. But there is a way to identify with Job that we don't often recognize
 - 1. And our Christianity would make a whole lot more sense when we finally figured this out
- D. And that's this:
 - 1. For everything Job had happen to him – all the losses, all the catastrophes
 - a. He never knew why it happened to him
 - 2. He never knew what was going on behind the scenes
 - a. He never knew that everything that happened to him was because in the spiritual realm, there was a grand contest
 - b. A contest between God and Satan
- E. Even at the end of the book of Job
 - 1. After Job has been defending himself against his accusing so-called friends
 - a. Demanding to have an audience with God Himself
 - b. And God Himself shows up
 - c. And eventually, in the encounter, provokes Job's repentance
 - 2. But even then, God never tells Job what happened behind the curtain
 - a. God never explains to Job how all that afflicted Job was because of the wager God had with Satan
 - b. A wager that God had a servant who would continue to be faithful no matter what he lost
 - c. And that servant was Job
 - 3. And Job never knew it
- F. In that sense, we all should be able to identify with Job
 - 1. Because no matter what our circumstances – we too do not know what goes on behind the curtain
 - 2. And yet that is a critical feature of Christianity
 - a. **Ephesians 6:12** (ESV) — 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
 - 3. We have no idea, do we?
- G. And yet, there is much going on behind the scenes in the Christmas story
 - 1. And our text reminds us of that
 - a. In a riveting tale of a fearful escape to exile in Egypt

- b. The murder of dozens of innocent infants
- c. And the eventual settling of the holy family in backwaters of Palestine

II. Text

A. **Matthew 2:13–23** (ESV) —

1. 13 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.”
2. 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 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.”
3. 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.
4. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:
5. 18 “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.”
6. 19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 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.”
7. 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.
8. 22 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.
9. 23 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.

B. The first thing we notice about this episode – actually a play in three acts – is that each act is presented by Matthew as fulfilling some aspect of Hebrew prophecy

1. Already a clue that more is happening behind the scenes that Mary and Joseph are unaware of
2. In fact, that is what Matthew, in his gospel writing, is most famous for
 - a. For showing how practically everything that Jesus did, and everything that happened to Jesus, fulfills the prophetic word
3. That’s why he laid out the genealogy of Jesus – to show how Jesus fulfilled the Davidic promises
4. That’s why he described Joseph’s dilemma – with his pregnant betrothed – in such detail – to fulfill the prophesy about the virgin conceiving a son
 - a. And that His name would be called Immanuel – God with us
5. And so, in this episode, with it’s three parts, Matthew describes the prophetic fulfillment for each part

- a. Leading us to see that more is happening behind the scenes than mere human machinations
- 6. And yet there is more going on that even Matthew is aware of

III. **A Primer on Prophecy**

A. But before we can sort out all of those things, we need to have a bit of a primer on prophecy

B. **Direct Prediction and Fulfillment**

- 1. When most us think of prophecy, we have in mind something that a prophet has predicted, and it has come to fulfillment directly in a way that is unmistakable
 - a. And that often takes place in the New Testament
- 2. A good example of that is in Matthew 2.6
 - a. When Herod got wind of the birth of a King of Israel, he consulted the chief priest and scribes and inquired where the child would be born
 - b. They answered by quoting Micah 5.2
- 3. **Matthew 2:5–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:
 - b. 6 “ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

C. **Present and Future Fulfillment**

- 1. Other prophecies have a primary reference to events taking place at the time when the prophecies were made
 - a. But they also have a future fulfillment which isn’t realized until hundreds of years, sometimes even thousands of years, later
 - b. And that involves a number of Messianic prophecies
- 2. Matthew 1.23 is an example
- 3. **Matthew 1:22–23** (ESV) —
 - a. 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
 - b. 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).
- 4. As we saw a couple weeks ago, when Isaiah first penned that prophecy it had a direct and immediate application regarding the wicked King of Judah, Ahaz
 - a. It was sign for Ahaz – who didn’t really want to have a sign from God
 - b. That the enemies he imagined he needed the help of the Assyrians would be defeated
- 5. But now we see that this prophecy also has a Messianic application
 - a. A real virgin conceives and will bear a son
 - b. And this Son will save His people from their sins

- c. And He will be Immanuel, God with us!
 - 6. So this prophecy seems to have been fulfilled way back when
 - a. But it's most significant fulfillment comes with Messiah Jesus
- D. **General Fulfillment of Types and Patterns**
 - 1. Then finally, there are prophecies general in nature, and not so specific
 - a. Yet together they weave a pattern which becomes unmistakable as the life and ministry of the Messiah unfold
 - 2. Example – how the OT sacrificial system points to Jesus and His atoning death on the cross as the Lamb of God
 - a. The author of Hebrews reveals how the death of Jesus rendered the OC sacrifices obsolete, and correctly predicted that they would pass away
 - b. And instead a New Covenant would supercede the Old
- E. Bottom line – we find all three types of prophetic fulfillment in Matthews
 - 1. In fact, two of the three drive the narrative in this episode

IV. **The Frantic Flight**

- A. The first act of the play involves a frantic flight of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt
 - 1. Recall that Herod had inquired of the religious leaders where the child-king would be born
 - a. Learning it would be Bethlehem
 - 2. And told the wise men that that's where he could be found
 - a. And also told them that when they found them, they should report back and tell him
 - b. So Herod could come and worship him too
 - 3. Of course Herod had no intention to come and worship the Messiah-king
 - a. He was threatened by even the bare mention of another Jewish king
 - b. He was going to kill the baby
- B. The wise men, as you recall, outwitted Herod
 - 1. Being warned in a dream not to tell Herod, they left the Jerusalem environs by another way
 - 2. And Herod was enraged that he had been had!
- C. Now Jesus was a real baby
 - 1. The incarnate Son of God really was incarnate – He had a real human body
 - a. And had Herod been able to get a hold of Him, he could have, and would have, killed Him
 - b. And Jesus would have been, not just mostly dead, but all dead
 - 2. But an angel appeared to Joseph and warned him of this impending danger
 - a. Told him to take the family and flee to Egypt
 - b. Because Herod was about to come after the baby to kill Him
- D. Egypt was not a bad option for the holy family as a destination
 - 1. It wasn't that far away from Bethlehem as the crow flies
 - a. It's border was maybe 70 miles away

2. And Egypt was part of the Roman empire at that time – but out of Herod’s jurisdiction
 - a. Even if Herod had discovered where Jesus had been taken, he couldn’t get his hands on Him
 3. Even more, there was a sizable Jewish community in Egypt
 - a. So Mary and Joseph and the baby would find a supportive community for the time they would spend there
 4. But once again, there is more behind the scenes than is revealed to Mary and Joseph
- E. **Out of Egypt**
1. **Matthew 2:15** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 ... This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”
 2. Now this is a quote from **Hosea 11.1**
 - a. And in Hosea, the text really doesn’t have to do with the Messiah
 - b. It refers to the fact that Israel was known as God’s son in the OT
 - c. And that God called Israel out of bondage in Egypt to be His people, leading them eventually to the Promised Land
 3. So what is Matthew doing here?
 - a. Is he just cherry picking scripture verses to support the baby Messiah’s movements?
 4. Well, actually no
 - a. Matthew recognizes the significance of the Messiah
 - b. That the Messiah is actually the true fulfillment of Israel
 - c. He is the true Son who fulfills God’s covenant when the former son Israel had failed
 5. We see that with great clarity in Isaiah, in the **Servant Hymns** – of which **Isaiah 53** is the climax
 - a. Sometimes the Servant of the Lord is clearly Israel
 - b. But at other times the Servant of the Lord is a person who does what Israel failed to do
 - c. And in Isaiah 53 it becomes clear that the Messiah so identifies with Israel that His work of redemption, in taking upon Himself the sins of God’s people, that He fulfills the role of Israel
 6. So when Matthew says this baby fulfills the prophecy “Out of Egypt I called my son” he shows how this Jesus is the perfect expression of God’s Son
 - a. Fulfilling the role Israel was originally intended to have
 7. So this prophecy has one expression in Hosea
 - a. But it’s more significant fulfillment is seen only in the Messianic period
- V. **Herod’s Rage**
- A. The next act involves Herod responding with rage when he realized that he had been duped by the wise men

1. He had found out from the wise men the approximate time the star had appeared
 - a. And likely calculating the time for preparation and travel
 - b. Building in plenty of margin for age of the child
 - c. He figured if he killed all the male babies two years old and under he would have a very high probability of taking out his supposed rival
- B. A couple of notes on this incident
 1. It seems an awful wicked response that would have forever cast Herod as the most wicked ruler of all time
 - a. Critics of the story have raised the issue that we have no other record of this infanticide anywhere outside of Matthew's gospel; why wouldn't anyone else make note of it?
 - b. That certainly may be true
 - c. But then Herod already had that kind of reputation
 - d. Particularly toward the end of his life he met any pretension of challenge to his reign with ruthless, violent and fatal consequences
 - e. He murdered his favorite wife, Mariamne (I can't imagine what happened to his less-than-favorite wives)
 - f. Had her two sons strangled
 - g. And murdered his own son, Antipater, for promoting himself too aggressively as Herod's successor
 2. And Bethlehem, at that time, was actually a pretty small town
 - a. No more than about 1,000 people – maybe as few as 300
 - b. So it could have been that between 10 and 20 infants were actually killed
 3. For Herod, that level of wickedness was small change
 - a. Nevertheless, for the families affected – imagine how devastating that must have been
 - b. The Romans were known for their ruthlessness
 - c. But even more, their own Herod, we equally ruthless and violent
- C. **Rachel Weeping**
 1. Well, Matthew connects this episode with **Jeremiah 31.15**
 2. **Matthew 2:17–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:
 - b. 18 “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.”
 3. Once again, this text in Jeremiah is not particularly Messianic
 - a. It refers to those who have been killed in the devastation surrounding the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon
 - b. And the death of families carted off to Babylon
 - c. A time of great distress and weeping and grief for the people of Judah
 4. So what is Matthew doing with this prophecy?

5. Well, the context of Jeremiah 31 is great hope!
 - a. Judah is falling to Babylon; the people will go into exile
 - b. But there is hope
 - c. Hope of a New Covenant
 - d. Hope also of a return to Jerusalem in due time
6. Original context
7. **Jeremiah 31:15–17** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 Thus says the LORD: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”
 - b. 16 Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.
 - c. 17 There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.
8. So Matthew is saying, the coming of Messiah Jesus is like that
 - a. Yes, there will be distress
 - b. But that distress, even the death of the children, will mark the coming of an even greater hope
 - c. A hope that the Messiah is here
 - d. Immanuel, God with us
 - e. His name will be Jesus and He will save His people from their sins
9. Just as Rachel’s weeping at the time of the exile
 - a. So the weeping in Bethlehem will signal the coming of the great hope of the world
10. Again, a word from the past, with its own meaning, is shown to apply to Messiah Jesus
 - a. Giving us all hope for the future

VI. **Return to Galilee**

- A. Finally, Act 3 is a return to Galilee
 1. When Herod died, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him it was safe to return to Israel
 2. So Joseph, Mary and Jesus headed home
 3. But they did not go to Bethlehem – which is where they might have gone had they wanted to connect themselves to their Davidic family
 - a. Positioning Jesus to more directly fulfill the Davidic covenant
 4. But instead they learned that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of Herod
 - a. The Romans had divided up Herod’s territory
 - b. And Archelaus was a particularly inept, but equally wicked and violent as his father
 5. They learned that Philip, a more benevolent administrator, had been governing Galilee

- a. And since Nazareth was where they had originated their journey, that's where they headed
- B. **He would be called a Nazarene**
 - 1. Now Matthew connects this episode with another fulfillment
 - 2. **Matthew 2:23** (ESV) —
 - a. 23 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.
 - 3. The curious thing about that, is that any OT prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene is nowhere to be found!
 - a. What are we to make of Matthew's use of this so-called prophetic word?
 - 4. Well, this is that third category of prophecy – a general principle, espoused by a number of prophets, which becomes evident in the life and ministry of Jesus
 - 5. You see, Nazareth was known as a backwater of Israel/Palestine
 - a. It's Po-dunk city; it's Nowhere's-ville
 - b. It's no the end of the earth, but you can see it from there
 - 6. So anyone and anything coming from Nazareth was demeaned, even despised
 - 7. Remember Nathanael's quip?
 - a. **John 1:46** (ESV) — 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"...
 - 8. So this is really the fulfillment of the general rejection and dismissal of the Messiah when He would come
 - 9. **Isaiah 53:3** (ESV) — (among many other texts)
 - a. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
 - 10. So this is the third type of prophecy – a general principle, espoused by many prophets, and recognizable when the Messiah appears

VII. **Behind the Scenes – Take 2**

- A. So Matthew goes to great lengths to establish that the coming of the child Jesus is the fulfillment of many prophetic words
 - 1. Some quite specific
 - 2. Some with meanings only apparent once Messiah arrives
 - 3. And some general principles expounded by a number of prophets
- B. It all indicates that there is more to this baby's birth than meets the eye
 - 1. But even more than that, it reminds us that behind these prophecies there are heavenly and spiritual forces at work, conspiring to produce these extraordinary events
 - 2. Two texts make that apparent for us – taking us behind the curtain
 - a. One from the OT and one from the NT
- C. **Psalm 2** (ESV) —

1. 1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
2. 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
3. 3 “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”
 - a. Can you not see Herod fulfilling this role as he sought to destroy the Anointed of God
 - b. The Anointed of God – Messiah
4. 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
5. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,
6. 6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”
 - a. God has a king of His own!
 - b. Messiah!
 - c. And then, the Anointed Himself speaks
7. 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
8. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.
9. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
 - a. The Christ, the Messiah, was preserved so He would reign and judge the world!

D. **Revelation 12** (ESV) —

1. 1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.
2. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.
3. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.
4. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.
 - a. Do you see how Satanic was this ruthless Herod?!
5. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,
6. 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.
 - a. The woman – first Mary, but more broadly, Israel, the people of God
 - b. And then eventually the church
7. 7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

8. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
 - a. This actually preceded the birth of Messiah
 9. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.
 10. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.
 - a. The coming of Christ hearkens the salvation and power and kingdom of God
 11. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”
 12. 13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.
 13. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.
 14. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.
 15. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.
 16. 17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.
 - a. Not only was the Messiah Jesus preserved
 - b. His people – the church – the ultimate manifestation of the woman in this passage – are also preserved
 - c. Which means you and I are preserved!
- E. Yes, there is more to this birth than meets the eye!
1. Prophecy is fulfilled
 - a. In a multitude of ways as Matthew so wonderfully points out
 2. And the prophecy belies the spiritual contest lurking behind every human event
 - a. And everything that you and I do – through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony
 - b. Impacts, not just the material world in which we live
 - c. But impacts the spiritual realm as well
- F. Do you trust this Messiah Jesus?
1. Not just the baby in the manger
 2. But the King of kings, the One who reigns and rules