

## **THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH**

*Gospel: Matthew 2:13-15; 19-23*

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.”

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “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.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over 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. 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 Nazorean.”

### **REFLECTION 1: JESUS’ BABY BOOK**

Many parents keep an account of their children’s growth and development in what is popularly known as a baby book. There the child’s first steps, first tooth, weight and height, school and adventures are documented with loving care and illustrated with photographs, so as to afford both parent and child many fond memories in the future. Though the facts in the baby book may become confused or exaggerated with the passage of time, they are nevertheless historical and provide an account of the child’s early years.

However, when reading the infancy narratives that record Jesus’ early years, we have to put aside the modern notion about baby books. Rather the reader must learn to appreciate Matthew’s intentions – to present Jesus as recording in his life the history of Israel.

Matthew has accomplished this by means of a carefully constructed series of three stories – the escape of Jesus and his parents into Egypt, the massacre of the infants on Herod’s order and the return of Jesus, Mary and Joseph from Egypt and settling in Nazareth. These are the characteristics of a fulfillment of prophecy supported by appropriate quotation.

In the escape of Jesus and his parents into Egypt, Matthew uses the same word ‘agollynai’ (to destroy him) as he would later use it in the story of the passion. Herod had no authority in Egypt, which at the time of Jesus’ birth had been under Roman rule for over a generation. Jesus’ escape to Egypt with his parents and the circumstances that surrounded it, recalled for Matthew’s readers the birth of Moses. Like Jesus, a jealous tyrant Pharaoh, had threatened Moses. As a new Moses, Jesus would be the legislator of a new covenant sealed between Israel and God.

Concluding the infancy story, with Herod dead, the path was cleared for Jesus to return home to Nazareth. The evangelist has skillfully woven together the presentation of Jesus’ early days portraying him as a new

Moses in a new Israel. He demonstrates that Jesus' messiahship was met from the outset by opposition that grew and culminated in his passion. There is no hint of failure or defeat in Jesus' mission. Rather all he did accorded perfectly with God's plan as expressed through the prophets. The child, Matthew would have us understand, that is nurtured and protected with loving care will learn through that experience the goodness and generosity of God. To be a parent, to love a child, is to share in the divine activity that resulted in the incarnation and through baptism, believers enter into the extended family of the church that comprises all the people of God.