

Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

13 After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.’ **14** So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt.

19 After Herod’s death, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother with you and go back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead.’ **21** So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, went back to the land of Israel. **22** But when he learnt that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as ruler of Judaea he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he left for the region of Galilee. **23** There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way the words spoken through the prophets were to be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

Other readings: Ecclesiasticus 3:2-6,12-14 Psalm 127 (128) Colossians 3:12-21

As in the gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Joseph is once again the main character in today’s gospel reading. Soon after his birth the life of Jesus is put at risk. Like Joseph in the Book of Genesis, who is the saviour of his people in Egypt, this Joseph too is the saviour of his family from the power of Herod, king of the Jews.

Joseph is portrayed as always ready to listen to the angel of the Lord. He listens as God speaks in his heart. Having been willing to take the pregnant Mary into his home, he now takes her and the child she has borne on a difficult journey to a foreign land. The return to the land of Israel is equally traumatic, since Joseph settles as a newcomer in the region of Galilee. Joseph demonstrates steadfastness in his commitment to protecting his family, but also willingness to respond when what is asked of him is new and unexpected.

The gospel makes clear from its opening pages that Jesus’ entry into this world brings with it a vulnerability which will be seen most clearly at the cross. The life of the child Jesus is put at risk due to the lust for power of the leaders of his day. Herod the king in fact never hesitated to use violent means to protect his kingship from threats both real and imagined

How does this gospel reading help us understand the deeper meaning of Christmas?

Does the courage of Joseph show us how to react to violence in our own time?

We pray for all fathers and mothers that they may always do what is best for their children.

We pray for all children who are neglected and ill-treated.