

# Daily Discipleship

## First Sunday after Christmas (A) – Matthew 2:13-23

**Discipleship:** *Following a Nazorean*

**Focus Question:** *Why is it helpful to know Jesus lived in a specific town and time?*

### word of life

**“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.’”** Matthew 2:23 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 2:13-23

The Gospels of Luke and Matthew are the only two books in the New Testament to include stories related to the birth and early years of Jesus. It is the Gospel of Matthew which includes stories of Joseph, the father of Jesus. In Matthew 1:20-25 we read about Joseph struggling with the pregnancy of Mary and the appearance of an angel in Joseph’s dream. As God’s messenger, the angel requests Joseph to take Mary as his wife and to raise Jesus as a son. Joseph obeys.

After Jesus is born and the wise men worship him (Matthew 2:1-12), Joseph has another dream where an angel of the Lord appears to him. This time the angel warns Joseph to escape from King Herod by fleeing to Egypt. Once more, Joseph is obedient to the angel of the Lord and takes his family at night to Egypt.

In Matthew 1-2, we discover the father of Jesus is a dreamer like the Joseph found in Genesis. (See Genesis 37:1-11; 40; 41) Dreams are where both of the Josephs encounter God and discern God’s will for their life. Both of the Josephs spend years living in Egypt where they find protection as they grow in years.

1. *What is your theory concerning the limited stories of Jesus in his early years?*
2. *What can be gained by learning about Joseph?*
3. *Is it surprising to learn of God’s communication to Joseph through his dreams? How so?*

Herod is furious when he realizes the wise men had departed Bethlehem without informing the king about the location and details of Jesus. So he orders all children in the Bethlehem area under the age of two years to be killed. The contrast of the adoring wise men from the East and the jealous King Herod is stark. Joseph and Mary are not to have an easy context to raise God’s son.

4. *What kind of ruler orders the massacre of innocent children?*
5. *How does this massacre foreshadow the future for Jesus?*

The original audience of Matthew’s gospel is assumed to be Jewish Christian. Thus, the gospel writer points to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. (See Matthew 2:15 and 2:17-18) The second reference is to Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob who is the father of the twelve sons and tribes of Israel. Rachel is also the mother of Joseph, the favorite son of her husband. She dies in the Bethlehem area in childbirth when her second son Benjamin is born. Her death causes weeping, but there is also wailing when her descendents are taken into exile.

After Herod dies, Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, has several additional dreams where an angel notifies him when it is time to return and relocate in his native Israel. Each time, Joseph faithfully obeys. The family settles in Nazareth where Jesus is raised until adulthood. Thus, Jesus is called a Nazorean. This title roots Jesus in a specific town and time period. Yet, this passage is problematic because this quote from the prophets cannot be found in the Old Testament.

## **word among us**

The three children were asleep as their father and mother gathered at their kitchen table. A decision had to be made. The neighborhood had been taken over by gangs. It was no longer safe to raise children. Who could stop the gangs and their senseless violence? The parents sighed under the weight of their concern. It wasn't right to succumb to the fear and move because of the gangs, but it wasn't right to risk their children.

1. *Have you ever moved because of a safety issue?*
2. *What can be done to make neighborhoods safe for children?*

Joseph and Mary moved from Israel to Egypt in order to protect their young child. Joseph was clear about the decision because an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him to do so. The angel appeared two more times in Joseph's dreams: 1) to notify him when it was safe to return to Israel and 2) to direct Joseph where to settle. No doubt Joseph appreciated this guidance in parenting Jesus. Not everyone has an angel of the Lord helping us to make decisions. Or do we?

3. *How do you make important decisions?*
4. *How do you turn to God in your decision-making?*

It has been said if God cannot reach us during our daytime hours, then God will pursue us at night during our dreams. Sometimes, our worries keep us from sleeping. Perhaps that is the ideal time for prayer and turning over our concerns to God.

5. *If you cannot sleep, how might you use that time for prayer and listening to God?*
6. *When is the best time for God to reach you?*

Parenting is not an easy venture. From the beginning Mary and Joseph faced challenges and life-threatening situations for their young son. They traveled to Bethlehem where Jesus was born in a manger. Then, they moved to Egypt until it was safe to return to Israel. Other boys born in Bethlehem at the same time as Jesus were not as fortunate as Jesus. They were murdered under a decree from King Herod. The times were not easy for parenting.

7. *What are the primary challenges for parents today?*
8. *What questions would you ask Mary and Joseph about parenting?*
9. *What questions would you desire an angel of the Lord to answer?*

Jesus and his family settled in Nazareth to be raised. He was called a Nazorean. This is not a theological term, but reflects a geographical location where Jesus lived. He played, laughed, ate, and lived with his family in a specific town and time. No doubt he had neighbors and experienced life in community. Most often, we focus on the divine nature of Jesus and forget the ordinary roots of his life.

10. *How helpful is it for you know Jesus grew up in a specific town and time period?*
11. *What would it have been like to be a neighbor of Jesus?*
12. *How might that experience have changed your life?*

### **Prayer**

O Christ, you have lived our experiences and know about the challenges of living. Thank you for coming to live among us and experiencing life on this earth. Amen

### **Dig Deeper**

Genesis 37:1-11; 40; 41

### *last word*

This week, ask God to be part of your decisions.



*Daily Discipleship*

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