

WHY THE LORD WAS TAKEN INTO EGYPT

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Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Matthew 2:13-15).

Do you remember the name of the little town where the Lord was born? It was Bethlehem, in the land of Judah. And who were the first people to hear of the Lord's birth? Shepherds, keeping watch over their flock by night in the nearby hills. The angel of the Lord appeared to them with the happy news that the promised Savior of Israel had been born and that they would find the Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. They hastened joyfully to find the Lord. When they had seen Him, they spread the good news to others.

But some people were not happy to hear of the Lord's birth. Among them was Herod, the king. Herod was the ruler in Israel, and he was a very jealous man.

Herod did not hear of the Lord's birth right away. It happened like this. Some time after the night of the Lord's birth, wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem. They had seen the promised star in the East and knew that this was the sign that a king was born among the Jews.

It was a long journey from their country to the land of Israel. When they arrived, they began to ask about the Lord in Jerusalem. Like the shepherds, they had come to see the Lord and to worship Him but they didn't know where to look. King Herod found out about these men. He did not know where or how to find the Lord either. Many babies were born in his kingdom. How could he tell which one was the Lord? Gathering together the priests and learned scribes of the Jews, Herod asked them where the Lord was to be born. They told him it was in Bethlehem.

Then Herod secretly called the Wise men and sent them off to Bethlehem. Herod told them to search diligently for the Lord and, when they had found Him, to bring back word to him. He said he wanted to go and worship the Lord, too. Do you think this was true? No, Herod was hoping to find the Lord to kill Him. Herod did not want a new king to take his throne away from him.

Do you think Herod would be able to kill the Lord? No. It was not permitted.

When the Wise men left Jerusalem, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, leading them to the Lord. When they came into the house where the

Lord was staying, they fell down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Him.

Then, it was time for the Wise men to leave. Would they go back and tell Herod where he could find the Lord? They never went back. They were warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod. So they departed for their own country by a different way instead of going back to Jerusalem.

After they had gone, the angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream, warning him. He told Joseph to leave Bethlehem immediately, because Herod was seeking to destroy the Baby Lord. The angel said, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word" (Matthew 2:13). Joseph obeyed the angel and fled to the ancient land of Egypt.

When Herod realized the wise men were not coming back, he became very angry. He did a terrible thing. He sent soldiers with orders to kill every baby boy in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding districts. Surely, Herod thought, the Lord would be one of them. But Herod's cruel plan did not succeed. By the time the soldiers arrived, the Lord was safely on the journey to Egypt, beyond the wicked king's reach.

Joseph fled with the Lord and Mary into that ancient land of pyramids and Pharaohs. He knew about that land for his ancestors, the children of Israel, had lived there long before. So Joseph stayed in Egypt with the Child and His mother until Herod was dead. Then the angel of the Lord came again to tell him that it was safe to return to the land of Israel. This is how the Lord was protected from the hatred of king Herod.

And the Lord protects us all. He sends guardian angels to be with us, especially when we are infants and children. As we grow up, the Lord continues to protect us from harm. He gives us the truths of His Word. They teach us what is right and wrong and give us the power to choose the one and fight against the other.

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the land of Egypt represents the learning of such truths from the Word. Egypt had been a place of learning from ancient times. It was a storehouse of knowledge. This was the other reason the Lord taken to Egypt as a child. Not only did He escape the anger of Herod by going to Egypt, but His stay there represented that He was to learn from the Word and so gain power to fight against all evil.

The Lord never wanted to be the king of any country in this world. "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), He said. Instead, He wanted to rule people's minds and hearts with truths and goods. The Lord is our heavenly King!

Amen.