

The Murder of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt

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Reading: Matthew 2:13-21

This story in the Word not only tells us about how, in Providence, the Lord was kept safe from Herod's terrible cruelty, but also how within each one of us the Lord's wonderful Providence keeps what is most important safe from harm. In time, this protection makes it possible for us to prepare ourselves to become angels in heaven.

For one thing, all babies and little children are kept safe from evil spirits who want to destroy them spiritually. The Lord keeps them safe by means of guardian angels that He sends to be near them. Even though some babies and children may be hurt or die, this can only affect their bodies. Their real selves, like yours, are their spirits. These are what evil spirits want most to destroy, but our guardian angels prevent them from doing this. Evil spirits cannot bear to be near angels, for angels have a heavenly sphere of goodness and of love for the Lord, which evil spirits hate and which makes them feel as if they can no longer breathe. And so, whenever evil spirits come near to angels, even if it is only one angel, the evil spirits (no matter how many) flee away as fast as they can go. In this way, by the Lord's Providence, the presence of angels protects us from spiritual destruction.

But there is also another reason besides His protection that the Lord spent the early years of His life in Egypt. From ancient times the people of Egypt had gathered and cultivated knowledge of all kinds, especially natural knowledge. They had a great reputation for their vast knowledge, and even today people go to Egypt to see the pyramids and temples that were built long ago and to wonder at the great knowledge that was needed to build these things. In short, for many centuries and even at the time of the Lord's birth on earth, the very name "Egypt" represented knowledge of all kinds. And so the fact that the Lord spent the first years of His life in Egypt meant that He dwelt in the land of knowledge, for, like everybody else born into the world, He had to begin His life by learning natural knowledge.

And so it is with each of us. The first part of our lives are spent mainly in learning knowledge, a great deal of knowledge of all kinds. To begin with, babies learn a lot by touching things and by tasting them. Later, when children begin to talk, they ask many questions. Still later, children go to school and learn reading and math, history and science, and other things as well. This kind of learning continues for many years, and it is necessary that we learn knowledge like this, for it helps to develop our minds, to prepare them in order to be able to think and to understand. Then, in time, we can become wise and useful people.

It is especially important for us to learn the stories of the Word and come to understand the wonderful truths they contain—wonderful truths such as why the Lord came into the world. Only from the Lord can we understand the real meaning of the miracles He performed and the parables He taught. The Word show us how the Lord came into the world to free us from the influence of evil loves and to come to love only what is true and good from Him.

The story of Herod's murder of the innocent children of Bethlehem and the Lord's escape into Egypt seems terrible and rather unlike the more familiar Christmas messages of peace and love. Yet, there are meanings within the story that are indeed worth thinking about and rejoicing in as we celebrate the Lord's birth into the world.