

See What Family Life Is Like With Christ

Matthew 2:13-23 • 2023-01-01 • New Years Day



Different families have different safety standards. Some might argue that today we are overprotective. Some parents practically make their kids live in little bubbles. They might put a bumper rail on a child's bed, have gallons of antibacterial hand wash, and then send their child off to school with a worried warning and an emergency cell phone. And they will make you think that if you don't do all these things that you must not love your child. Others argue, "You gotta let 'em fall down so they know how to get up. And if they don't eat some dirt, they won't ever be able to handle life." Decades ago, many families never even considered using a five-point car harness for their children. Many families simply tossed their children into the backseat in a big pile. And it's not just the parents who took risks. I've heard siblings reminiscing of their childhood together. It's often followed by a laugh and reflective moment of awe, "I can't believe we lived through all that!"

Consider how God cares for his own sons and daughters. You're part of God's family. Through faith in Jesus, you have been adopted as his own child. You'd expect him to take good care of you. Where does he draw the line when *you* come face to face with danger? We see the answer as we look at Matthew 2 this morning. There we see the first sign of danger towards Jesus and his family. And we'll see what family life is like with Christ.

Mary and Joseph faced a whirlwind of activity! After the angels, the shepherds, and the lowly birth of Christ in a manger came life in Bethlehem, David's town. Then came the appearance of the magi who worshipped Jesus. Sure, Mary and Joseph had a lowly life. But they knew behind it all was the awesome truth: "We're walking with Jesus! We're actually part of the family of God!" Could it get any better?

But it didn't take too long for things to take a frightening turn! We don't know exactly when this took place, but it was very soon after the magi had left. It was before the spring of 4 B.C. when Herod the Great died. God warned Joseph that Mary's newborn son was in danger. Herod was seeking the child in order to kill him. Joseph got up during the night and left with Mary and Jesus under the cover of darkness. His head must have been spinning! Mary's baby was born to save the world. But now God wanted Joseph to save Jesus from Herod's clutches!

Herod was a real threat. He had a reputation for doing whatever it took to secure his throne—even killing some of his own children. He wouldn't hesitate a moment to snuff out anyone who took claim to the title king. You can imagine the paranoid mind of Herod burning with jealousy. The magi had asked, "where is the one *born king* of the Jews." Herod wasn't born king. He played the game of politics to be king. In defiance of the very face of Scripture, Herod had in mind to kill someone who was foretold by the prophets—a child born in Bethlehem who would be the Messiah. A town like Bethlehem may have had anywhere from 15-20 male children aged two and under. Herod probably had them all killed in order to put down a possible threat to his throne. This is how the world welcomes Christ!

Joseph and Mary had to flee in the darkness of the night from the threat of the sword. Don't think that your life will be any easier as you walk about with Jesus and call him your King. Herod's infanticide was terrible and horrific. But is the world any kinder today? Herod's sinful mind led him to murder some infants that might have threatened his throne. Today countless millions slaughter their own sons and daughters who threaten to disrupt their own personal kingdom. The world reasons, "I have to do whatever it takes to make my life better. Who is God to stop me?" Herod's actions were terrible. There is nothing new in the mind of sinful flesh. And don't think that violent plotting is just limited to those who commit an open or secret abortion. That is the way that the sinful mind operates against God. You can't appeal to reason, compassion, or mercy. "*The sinful mind is hostile to God.*"

I'm sure it wasn't hard at all for the devil to find someone like Herod to threaten the infant Jesus and his family. Do you think that the enemy would ever have trouble finding people willing to persecute and kill Christians? The early Christians died at the hands of the rulers and authorities. They were sought out and dragged into arenas put on trial and even crucified. The terror continued. Your spiritual forefathers, whether you are German, Prussian, or not, your spiritual forefathers long ago left a church ruled by the antichrist. Many of them were hunted down and killed. Luther was declared deserving of death for what he did: confessing Jesus as his King. Still hundreds of years after Luther many fled the authorities who were forcing them to turn aside from the truth regarding their king—they came to America, many of them to the Midwest and they started many of the old Lutheran Synods we still have today.

Will the devil be hard-pressed to find someone to go after you because of your faith today? You and the next generation of Christians are increasingly going to be under more and more pressure and attacks. Watch as you, your children, and the next generation of Christians will come to a point where they will realize, the family of God will be under threat. Persecution will come.

And the tide can turn fast. Yes, there was the time of joy when the wise men brought their treasures and worshipped Christ. But then overnight Joseph and Mary and Jesus were fleeing for their lives. How much longer until you, I, your children, your grandchildren face the same threats and struggles that God's people have always faced?

How will you handle it? Could you imagine if Joseph had said, “Whoa. I didn’t sign up for this! Here Mary, take your baby and have a nice life!” But aren’t you and I tempted to do just that? Our fears come not at the threat of bloodshed, but sometimes at the smaller persecutions. “Whoa. I didn’t realize posting something religious or openly sharing my faith in my king would be so problematic. That’s what family life is like with Christ?”

But there are only two options. You either worship Christ as your king, or in fear you walk away from him when trouble comes and abandon the one who became our brother. I haven’t always been able to push aside the fears. How about you? Could we be so bold as to belong to the family of God and claim Christ as our king? Do we deserve to?

What is family life like with Christ? God doesn’t withdraw from his family at the first onset of danger. The Father should have withdrawn his Son from the world when it turned against him. But he didn’t. He sent his Son to endure the persecution and threats. Family life with Christ will include persecution and pain. But instead of turning aside we can trust there will also be protection from evil. We need never fear! God protects his own!

Joseph experienced that truth right off the bat! Despite his prominent role as the stepfather of Jesus, he doesn’t say a single word on the pages of Scripture. But his actions speak more than words. He takes the child and Mary, he flees from Bethlehem that very night, he stays in Egypt as directed by God. Without any delay, he acts and goes by God’s will and direction. His was a life of faith following the direction of his God. He trusted in God’s plan and care.

But Joseph clearly can’t take the credit. God is in control. Have you ever noticed how God’s plan for his family is portrayed in Scripture? Matthew wants you to notice. The life of the Church and of God’s Son is portrayed in the Scriptures long before it is fulfilled in us. Ancient Israel was in Egypt, but they were called out by God to be his own. Jesus was called out of Egypt back to the promised land. We were called out of the darkness of sin to be God’s own. Israel passed through the waters to become God’s Son. Christ was baptized and declared to be God’s Son at his baptism. So were we declared children through our baptism. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus fasted 40 days and faced our enemy. We sojourn and rely on God along with all God’s children, all the Church today. Israel found God’s rescue through prophets who gave God’s word and performed wonders like raising the dead. Jesus came to share the Word and conquered death. He is the fulfillment of God’s plan for his family! We follow him in faith. The point of it all? God wants us all to see that he has a plan for his family and carries it out through his Son!

The danger would continue for Jesus’ family. I can’t imagine Joseph and Mary not hearing about the slaughter that took place after they had escaped. They certainly found out when they had returned. In fact, Joseph was afraid when they returned. Archelaus, Herod’s son, couldn’t be considered any better than his father. When his father died the people revolted. He brutally suppressed that revolt and killed 3000 people. Some believe Joseph and Mary would have witnessed the bodies of those killed in the revolt dangling from wooden beams of torture until they died. Upon return to the land of Israel Joseph had to be thinking, “What are we getting into here?” We can understand why Joseph would have been afraid. But we can further understand why he would have been guided and protected by God’s plan.

That plan included Jesus coming to face rejection, persecution, and live in lowliness for us. God provides another directive and solution for safety. Jesus wouldn’t grow up in the city of Kings or even in lowly Bethlehem near the city. He would be told to go to Galilee. There he would return with Mary and Jesus to his hometown –Nazareth. A place of disdain and contempt. But as Joseph headed up to Nazareth and settled there, he fulfilled what was spoken by Isaiah that the Messiah would appear first in Galilee. And it was also spoken by other prophets that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. He would be from such a lowly place.

Jesus came for more than just living in lowliness. He came to take the place of his brothers! He came to save his family from evil forever! Mary would live to see him hanging on a piece of torture, hanging on a cross. And over his head that phrase would be written almost as to solely ridicule the fact that he was a nobody, “Jesus of Nazareth.” And Herod’s fears were fulfilled on the day that “King of the Jews” died. Jesus was king. He was on his own terms: as a sacrifice for sin, to reign forever on his heavenly throne, our king, our Savior.

All along Jesus was safe. He would say years later, “*Don’t you know I could call on my Father and he would send legions of angels to protect me?*” The devil would never have his way when it came to God’s plan for his family. God’s children are always safe—even when we don’t think our situation or circumstance would allow for it. God’s safety standard for his family? Total secure and perfect protection from all harm and danger! No danger can win over Christ. Nothing can rob us of our place secure in his family or take it from us. Our living king and brother Jesus assures us!

Will he who faced such danger and despair to become your brother ever leave you alone to face danger? You are part of the family of God. And whatever happens God cares for his own. See what family life is like with Christ? Someday we will be standing with Jesus, who became our brother. We will be reflecting back on this life with our living Savior. God’s perfect plan of saving you will be fulfilled! Can you imagine the glorious picture of his family as we look back on today’s persecutions and struggles? We will be forever safe in his kingdom. And we will say with wonder and joy as we ponder our past, “I can’t believe we lived through all that and we’re alive today!”