

## Homily for Sunday, December 28, 2025 (Holy Family)

You may have noticed that our gospel readings are not in chronological order. The opening line of today's gospel tells us that the Wise Men had *left*. They paid



homage to the new-born King, left their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and went home. Next weekend, the Feast of Epiphany, we will be told about the *arrival* of the Wise Men. Act surprised next weekend!

So, the Wise Men are gone back to their homeland. But as you know from the story of the Magi, in their searching for the child king, Jesus, they were summoned by King Herod. He lied to them by telling them that he, too, wanted to know the whereabouts of this baby so that he could also pay homage to the new-born king. Underneath this lie was King Herod's plan to kill anyone who would challenge his kingship. Herod even had members of his own family killed in order to preserve his position as king. The Wise Men, after finding the Child Jesus, are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to go back to their countries by another way. Herod is enraged that he has been duped by the Wise Men. So, he sends out an order that all male children under the age of two should be killed. That should do the trick.

This is the Gospel of Matthew, and Matthew, more than any of the other gospel writers is big on making connections with the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). He wants his audience to see that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophets of old. Twice Matthew writes, in today's gospel story, ***"this came about to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophets."*** Matthew wants to tell us that Jesus is the continuation and the fulfillment of everything that came before, and that he didn't just fall out of the sky totally disconnected from human history.

For instance, about 1,500 years before the birth of Jesus, the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt under Pharaoh. The problem for Pharaoh was that he feared a rebellion might break out as the Hebrews were now outnumbering the Egyptians. So, he literally whipped and beat the Hebrews into submission, and when that wasn't enough, he ordered that all boys born of Hebrew women were to be killed. That should do the trick.

Moses, a Hebrew baby boy, through the hand of God and the kindness of Pharaoh's daughter, was spared and rose up to liberate the Hebrew people. That liberation was called Passover, the greatest feast in the Jewish calendar.

So you see similarities between Moses and Jesus. Both had their lives threatened, both are saved, and both become liberators—Moses the liberator of the Jews and Jesus the liberator of the world.

There is human history and then there's something called salvation history. In a sense, it's all salvation history, as God is using everything that unfolds in human history to save us. Even the bad things the molding hand of God is turning into good.

Like every family, including mine and yours, the Holy Family had their share of difficulties and anxiety. Emperor Caesar Augustus' edict to have a census of the entire Roman Empire forced a very pregnant Mary to leave for Bethlehem and give birth to Jesus in a barn. That's history. King Herod's cruelty morphed into the murder of baby boys forced Mary, Joseph and the child to flee into Egypt. That's history. When King Herod died, one of his equally cruel sons, Archelaus, took over. The Holy Family was to settle in a land ruled by Archelaus, but since they feared him, they were forced to move north to Nazareth. That was history.

History forced itself onto the Holy Family, causing them to be on the run like a refugee family for fear of their lives. Yet, underneath it all was "salvation history," that is, the hand of God, the Providence of God, was still at work. Even though there were evil forces at work in the world, God was still in charge. Every time there was a roadblock, God would come to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph would trust in God. Joseph believed in salvation history; he believed God was still active in the midst of the messiness and tragedy that life can sometimes be. Joseph, in today's gospel, is given three timely dreams. Dream #1: flee to Egypt because Herod wants your son dead. Dream #2: Come back from Egypt, for Herod is dead. Dream #3: Don't settle in Israel, for Herod's cruel son, Archelaus is there; keep going north to Galilee.

History, the plight of the Holy Family, unfortunately, is repeated over and over again in our own time. Holding onto “salvation history,” what God is bringing about underneath the surface of “regular history,” reminds me of a movie I recently saw. It came out in 2014 and is called Selma. It’s set in the early 1960s in a town in Alabama called Selma. Although half the population is African Americans, only 1% of these people are considered eligible to vote. Systemic discrimination denied almost all of the black people the right to vote. Blacks were denied the rights also to serve on juries or to hold local office. Although the people protested in a non-violent way, it made no difference at all.

In early 1965, in defiance of the sheriff’s orders that no more than three people could gather for a demonstration, the black population gathered anyways. 3, 000 of them were arrested and beaten while a Baptist minister was killed in a café in the hope that this would be a deterrent to the rest of them. On March 7, 1965, the great civil rights leader and pastor, Martin Luther King, led a protest over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma that resulted in 17 black citizens being beaten and hospitalized and 50 more went home with injuries. The town police were well armed. That was history. Two days later, on March 9<sup>th</sup> Martin Luther King led a second march onto the bridge this time accompanied by a few thousand including priests, ministers and many Catholic nuns. When they got to the middle of the bridge they knelt in silence. The result was the same, a pastor from Boston, who felt called to join the protest was killed by the Ku Klux Klan. That was history. Twelve days later, on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1965, Martin Luther King led a four-day march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital of Alabama. This time 3, 200

protesters began the march that eventually swelled into 25, 000. This time, there was no violence directed toward them. That was history. That was also salvation history.

Although the forces of history were against Mary and Joseph, they knew that the incarnate Word of God, Jesus, was in their midst, so they pressed on, they kept moving forward. Even threats of murder could not prevent salvation history from pushing into history and transforming it. I have a feeling that Reverend Martin Luther King, and the long-suffering African Americans of the South, knew the story of the Holy Family and drew strength from it.

If it's true of them, it's true of us. Against what seems like the greatest of odds, God is still fashioning a world of truth, justice and beauty. As long as there has been wars, there have been peacemakers. As long as we have been plagued with disease, there have also been healers. As long as there has been pain and confusion, there have been people labouring to find solutions. As long as there has been ignorance in the world, there have always been willing teachers to guide us toward greater enlightenment. As long as there has been history, there has always been salvation history. God's saving hand has always, and continues to be, at work in our world.

*~Fr. Phil*