

Meditation Matthew 2:13-18

Meditation in the voice of Joseph,

I was miles away: in the workshop I rented, my plane skimming the surface of the wood rhythmically. Back and for, back and for, lulling me almost to sleep. And suddenly I knew, in an instant, we had to go. The three of us, and tonight: tomorrow would be too late. There was urgency; there was danger like we'd never known before.

I didn't want to frighten Mary, but I had to make sure we left that very night, so I told her what had happened; after her experience with the angel, she had no trouble believing it was a message for God. She packed what she could and cooked a meal to get us off to a good start.

You'd think I'd feel good, wouldn't you. Suppose I do in a way, because we're out of Israel, relatively safe, and I think I've done what God wants. But there's something I feel terribly bad about.

It's the other children. The ones we left behind, ordinary children just like mine before they grew up. Some of them are children of people we know, people who've been good to us. Isaac, for example, his little Ahab is still there, and Isaac was so kind to us: he always put any business he could my way.

But there are lots of them: just babies toddling about or lying in their cradles. They haven't hurt anyone! Little boys with parents like Mary and me, who'll be inconsolable. And how do they explain it to other children: explain that the king, even a king like Herod, had sent people to kill their little brothers. I would have warned them, honestly, but there wasn't time. Or was there? Maybe there was, but how was I to know? How do I know now for that matter?

And how can it be God's will? I suppose it wasn't God's will that the little ones were killed, it was just Herod's way of handling things, and it was God's plan to rescue Jesus from him. But why didn't he rescue the other children, too? Suppose it would have looked odd for there to be no tiny boys in Bethlehem, and the soldiers would just have looked further afield and killed even more children with all the uncertainty. And even if God had whipped the little ones up to heaven before his eyes, Herod wouldn't have changed his mind, not if it had been every child in the world. He's too far gone. So much loss, though. So much terrible loss.

But maybe it isn't all loss, even for them. Maybe, just maybe, the Pharisees are right and there is a final resurrection of all Israel. And maybe, then, God really will dry the tears of those mums and dads and return their little ones to them. The broad perspective, I suppose, and not easy to keep in your mind, but I'll try. Yes, I'll try; it's the only thing I can do.

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