



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The First Sunday after Christmas

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Jesus Is the True Son of God

The identity of Jesus as the Son of God has never been in question. The Old Testament prophets spoke about the coming Messiah as God's Son. Jesus demonstrated that he was God's Son with his words and works. The New Testament writers all agree that Jesus is the Son of God. In the Gospel for today God the Father demonstrates that Jesus is his true Son. There can be no doubt that the life and death that saved us from sin is the life and death of God's perfect Son, Jesus.

Sermon

Matthew 2:13-23

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more." ⁹

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Introduction – There are some dramatic episodes in the life of Jesus when one of his followers confessed out loud that he was the Son of God—they said it audibly so that others could hear it. Peter did it twice, both times late in Jesus' ministry: **You are Holy One of God** and **You are the Son of the living God**. Martha said it out loud at her brother Lazarus' gravesite: **You are the Messiah, the Son of God**. And then there was that centurion who

presided over Jesus' crucifixion. When he witnessed everything that happened when Jesus died, he said, **Surely he was the Son of God.**

But none of these episodes is nearly as dramatic or as compelling as the times when God the Father spoke out loud to endorse Jesus as his true and only Son. The first time was at Jesus' baptism: A voice from heaven said, **"This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well-pleased."** God spoke again at Jesus' transfiguration: **A voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased. Listen to him."** God spoke out loud a third time just before Jesus' arrest and death. Jesus called out, **"Father, glorify your name."** **Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again."**

Some people who heard the voice were terrified. Others thought the sound was thunder or the voice of angel. But whatever people thought, it was a big deal and it's still a big deal. We sit up and notice when God the Father with his own clear and mighty voice ratifies Jesus as his Son and the Savior of the world.

We haven't arrived at Jesus' ministry yet, not this morning. Jesus is still a little boy and 30 years have to pass before we hear of God speaking from the clouds. This morning we hear about three events in Jesus' life, two of them inconvenient, one of them tragic, but none of them dramatic or compelling. We won't hear God's voice this morning but we will see God in action. And we will become certain once again that from conception to ascension and from Bethlehem to Egypt, God endorsed Jesus as his Son. Whether 1) protecting him from danger or 2) identifying him as Savior, God is clear about Jesus:

This Is My Son!

1. Some time has passed since the birth in Bethlehem, maybe two or three years. In the meantime, a group of Magi, some very wise men, spotted a new star in the sky. They were led to believe that it signaled the birth of a king in Israel. They arrived in Jerusalem, gained an audience with the present king, and asked where the newborn king was. Not a good idea. Not just this King Herod but all the King Herod's deserved their reputation as butchers, especially if their throne was threatened. What Herod wanted was for these Magi to let him know where the new king was so he could kill him.

Here's where God stepped in. We have to understand this. God could have destroyed Herod on the spot. He could have whisked Jesus off to a safe house or a high mountain. But that wasn't part of the plan. The divine plan was that God's Son would experience what human beings experience: God's Son would be born as human beings are born; he would have a father and mother to care for him; he would experience hunger, exhaustion, and trouble; he would be a helpless little boy before he grew up to be a man. God wasn't going to pull his Son out of the human experience, so instead, God entered the human experience himself—and he did it with dreams.

The first dream came to the Magi; they were warned in a dream not to report back the Herod. The next dream came to Joseph: **An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.** After Herod died **an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph (that's the third dream). Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.** But there was another Herod on the throne, Archelaus, and he was a butcher like his father. Judea wasn't a safe place. **So, having been warned in a dream (dream number 4), Joseph withdrew to the district of Galilee.**

God was not going to lift his Son out of the human experience to protect him; that wasn't part of the plan. But he wasn't going to let the plan fail, either. It wouldn't be interrupted; it wouldn't be thrown off course. Jesus would arrive at his baptism, he would carry out his ministry, he would preach the good news, and he would die on the cross according to the plan and on schedule and no Herod was going to change that. This is my Son, God was saying, and I will protect him from danger.

So why didn't God find a way to protect those little boys in Bethlehem? Why did he allow Herod's soldiers to slaughter them? Of course, we could ask that question about every evil action. Why doesn't God do something? God has power and control over everything, but he doesn't always eliminate danger. Danger and even death are part of life. What God does with both danger and death is use them for the good of his people. So ever since the awful day in Bethlehem, God has used these little martyrs, the first of millions of martyrs, to teach us that being with Jesus often brings danger and death. What overcomes danger and death and finally defeats it and destroys it is Jesus' life and death and resurrection—all of which happened exactly according to plan because God protected his Son from danger.

2. These are the cold hard facts. First, Joseph took Jesus to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. Second, the innocents were slaughtered but Jesus was not. Third: Joseph returned from Egypt and eventually settled with Jesus in Nazareth. But behind the facts there's something subtle going on. In all three stories Matthew includes an Old Testament prophecy that the event fulfilled. First: **And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet.** Second: **Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled.** And third: **So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets.**

God could have sent Joseph to dozens of countries to protect Jesus. But the prophet Hosea had written: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.** So God sent Joseph to Egypt to fulfill the prophecy. God could have spared the children in Bethlehem but Jeremiah's prophecy needed to be fulfilled: **A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.** God could have settled Joseph in Capernaum, but the prophets said **that he would be called a Nazarene.** None of those prophecies mentioned Messiah by name and they didn't forecast Messiah directly. But in all three of them Messiah was the culmination and the conclusion of the prophecy. So God led Jesus to these prophecies and he connected Jesus with these prophecies. And so God clearly identified Jesus as the promised Savior. God says to us: This is the Savior I promised! This is my Son!

Three events: two of them inconvenient, one of them tragic, but none of them dramatic or compelling. Nothing like the voice of God thundering from the sky. But in a quiet way Matthew shows us that from the start God was guiding and guarding his Son through the plan of salvation. And so we can also be sure that God guides and guards us through the plan of salvation. He guides us to his Word and guards us against the devil's attacks. He guides us to his promises and guards us from doubt and despair. He guides us to Jesus and guards us from guilt and shame. He guides us to heaven and guards us against the fear of death. And then God says with clarity and love: These are my sons and these are my daughters. I protect them from danger and I show them their Savior. Amen.