

PRAYER:

Lord God, we remember your Son's prayer for us that we are in the world but not of it. We also know that you are ready to join us and walk with us, as does your risen Son. So Lord, join us now as we worship, and as we seek your presence in our everyday life here on earth.

In his name we pray, Amen

Readings

- Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
- Matthew 2:1-23

Song : 10000 reasons Matt Redman

*Bless the Lord, oh my soul, Oh my soul, worship His holy name;
Sing like never before, oh my soul, I worship your holy name*

1. The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning, it's time to sing your song again
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
Let me be singing when the evening comes.
2. You're rich in love and You're slow to anger, Your name is great and Your heart is kind.
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing 10,000 reasons for my heart to find.
3. And on that day when my strength is failing, the end draws near and my time has come,
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending; 10,000 years and then forever more.

© 2011 Thankyou Music - Used by permission CCLI 509237

Message: "The World Closes In"

Background

Today I'm asking you to rewind to Christmas. What the Word says to us following Jesus' birth has relevance for the year to come. The Holy family is in Bethlehem when the Magi call on Jesus - Herod had told them to report back to him. So already the world closes in on the little family - betrayal, deceit, jealousy, greed all surface. But God is present and the magi return to (Persepolis?) by another route. Shortly after, a rancid Herod orders the murder of all male children aged two or less. Joseph is warned (Matthew 2:13). We learn a little about Joseph here. A very capable man with some resources (he was, after all, a business man). He procures a donkey, and sets off at **night** toward Egypt. Able, apparently, to take care of his family on the road (good choice, God) we can deduce that Jesus was between one and two years old. It is 65 kms from Bethlehem to the Egyptian border. That's about 12 hours walking at about 5 kms/hour. Probably about 3 or 4 days. The coast road followed an aquifer, so their gourds could be refilled at places like Gaza, then a peaceful refuge on the desert road. From the border it was about another 20 kms to the nearest

Egyptian city. Memphis, later Cairo, was the capital, but there were others closer, e.g. Pelusium.

Then Herod called the magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report back to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, (accommodation upgrade?) they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another way.

When they had gone, an angel of the lord appeared to Joseph, in a dream, Get up he said, take the child 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 and so was fulfilled what the lord had said though the prophet Hosea: out of Egypt I called my son.

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the magi, he was furious, and gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the magi. From then what was said by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: a voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and mourning, Rachel weeping for her children (Matthew 2: 7-18) The world closes in!

The post birth happenings into which our Lord was born resonate in many ways with the world we experience and read about. Jesus' arrival could have been snuffed out as the world closed in on the Holy Family. But God's provision was there, just when needed, one step ahead of evil intent.

After Herod had died, an angel of the lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 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." (Matthew 2:19—23)

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there (the world closes in). Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 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 (Isaiah 11:1).

Jesus' humble and troubled beginnings were predicted in Micah 5.2 and Isaiah 53.

Jesus talks extensively about our life and struggles in the world. (John 14: 15—21) Jesus' assurance that the Spirit – the advocate of God himself would come after Jesus was gone to comfort, encourage and intercede for us, as the world closes in (John 14:17—21). Not only does our Lord bear our sins, carry our sorrows, and give us grace. He provides for us in this life (John 14:26—28 and John 17).

Hymn: *by John Bowring*

1. In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.
2. Through the cross Christ's love empowers us, worldliness and self deny;
By his Spirit it inspires us, him, through love, to glorify.
3. When the woes of life o'ertake us, hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake us, from it shines our peace and joy.
4. Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure, joys that through all time abide.
5. In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.

Benediction

May the peace and blessing of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come and abide with you,
now and always Amen

Acknowledgement: Tyndale NIV 3rd edition 2019, Life Application Bible/ commentary and Oxford Bible atlas.

This service prepared by Grant Jewell for HopeNet SA Inc