

1.5.2025 Christmas 2 (Matthew 2:19-23)

You may have heard the saying, “God is never in a hurry, but He is always on time.” It’s true that time and again the Bible portrays our Creator as One who holds time in His hands, One who would never be found rushing around like a holiday shopper in search of that last minute gift, but instead, the God who, on His own eternal timeframe, works all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

God is never in a hurry, or is He? For many years I thought that there was just one time in the Bible where God is described as being in a hurry. That single instance is found in the very familiar, Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), which is a parable Jesus shared that speaks of God’s love for the lost, a story He told after the Pharisees and religious leaders accused our Lord of welcoming and eating with sinners (Luke 15:2). In this story we see a Father, we see God, in a hurry as He runs to receive His humble, repentant child who’s finally “*come to his senses*” and returned home to his Father’s love. Here we find a beautiful illustration of God’s unconditional love, His endless mercy, and His complete refusal to limit the depth of His amazing grace.

There is endless comfort found in that image of the Father running to receive His child, because this is not a story composed in the mind of St. Luke. This is in fact the heart and mind of God, because these are the words of our Lord. It was God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, who painted this picture of the Father running to receive us, and when we consider the words of our Epistle lesson today, we discover that in telling this parable our Lord was fulfilling His mission to proclaim, and to reveal, the Father’s love to us. His mission, as stated by the prophet Isaiah, and proclaimed by our Savior, is this: “*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound*” (Isaiah 61:1).

This is our Lord’s mission, to reveal God’s unconditional love, His endless mercy, and His amazing grace, and here we should also consider the words of St. John, who spoke of Christ in this way, saying, “*No one has ever seen God,*

but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known" (John 1:18). So, the One who God has anointed to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, the one and only Son who has made the Father known, reveals God as One who runs, who is in a hurry to receive us when we at last open our hearts to Him.

This is the heart of our Father in Heaven as revealed by His One and Only Son, and while I once believed that there was only one time God is ever pictured as being in a hurry, after studying the chapter of St. Matthew in which we find our Gospel lesson today, I found that from a certain perspective it also reveals God as being in a hurry. Consider these words, written by St. Matthew, *"...behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt"* (Matthew 2: 13-14). Here, we learn that the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph fled by night. They arose and rushed into Egypt upon word from the angel that Herod the Great sought to kill the young Christ child.

Now, consider these words from our Gospel reading. It's just a few verses later that St. Matthew writes, *"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee"* (Matthew 2:19-22).

When reading these texts the image that may come to mind is one of Mary caring for the young child Jesus, and Joseph looking after her. From our human perspective, either as parents, or as people who were once little children in the care of our parents, we probably picture Joseph and Mary as the caregivers, protectors, the travelers in this story. It's the two of them that seem to be at the center of this story, as they rush from Bethlehem to Egypt

and from Egypt to Galilee. We see Joseph and Mary as those who were in a hurry, but perhaps from a heavenly perspective, it was God, who Mary held in her arms, that was in a hurry. Perhaps, as the two of them offered their lives to Him, as they did what they could to care for the young Christ Child, it was their Creator who was in a hurry to protect His mother Mary, her husband Joseph, and the human life of the Child Jesus.

God was in a hurry. He was in a hurry in these Gospel passages because it wasn't yet time for our Lord to lay down His life for the sins of the world. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled to spare the Christ Child's life, because His time had not yet come. One day He would freely give His life on the Cross at Calvary, but as Jesus said, it was first necessary that He "*fulfilled what was written in the law and the prophets*" (Luke 24:44). Our Lord fled, God was in a hurry, so that at just the right time He might complete the work of Salvation that His Father gave Him to accomplish (John 5:36, 17:4), and notice that it was once again, just as we recognized in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it was because of us that God was in a hurry. In the parable, the Father was in a hurry to welcome us home, and in the Gospel passage, He was, in a sense, running to carry out His perfect plan for our Salvation. God moved Joseph to flee with Mary and the Christ child, to the end that one day our Savior would return to offer His life for ours, as the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Christ fled for us, and now we are free because our Savior did not flee from the Cross. When His hour had come, Christ died for us. He gave His body and shed His blood. He did not flee death when the fullness of time had come, but instead, He set us free, free from the curse of sin and the sting of eternal death, and now, today, in His house, through this holy meal in which we commune with Him, our Lord and Savior gives us grace and strength to flee, to run from the world, the flesh, and the devil, that we may rest in the arms of the One who has defeated sin and death and opened to us the gates of everlasting life.

You may have heard the saying, "God is never in a hurry, but He is always on time." It's a clever saying, but I'm not certain it's completely true, because when it comes to saving His children - God will always be in a hurry.