

“Two perspectives” Mat 2:13-23

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." ¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Today's Gospel reading from Matthew was quite unusual. How could we retell it in our own words? What was it about? Brief description of what happened in Joseph's, Mary's and Jesus' life after the magi left. Besides not very eloquent description, just few historical facts and few comments referring to the Old Testament prophecies.

You know that 'gospel' in Greek means 'good news'. When we read today what evangelist Matthew has written down for us, it is not easy to see in which way these events are good news for us. The answer is not exactly obvious.

But there is something Matthew wrote that is indeed very important for us. What Matthew helps us to see - are two different perspectives. Two ways how we can see what is going on in this world. One, ours, human perspective on things and the other - divine perspective. Or we could say that one is children's perspective and other is parent's perspective.

Let's try to unpack what each of these perspective looks like and what does it mean for us, for our lives, for our understanding of this world. Let's begin with the human one. What can we read and understand looking at the event that followed the departure of magi?

The angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and commanded him to take the child and his mother and to flee to Egypt, for Herod is searching for the child and wants to kill Him.

Joseph already had had a good share of trouble. Having these previous revelation that Mary was pregnant from the Holy Spirit, that Joseph still had to take her as his wife.

That they had to travel to another city, and to give birth to their son not in their own home. The shepherds visiting them and telling all the wonderful (and alarming) things about Jesus, in the temple Simeon and Anna both spoke about their son as the Savior, as some kind of very, very important person.

On top of that now Joseph had this dream, that Herod, who was famous of his cruelty, was looking for Jesus to destroy Him. They had to leave in a rush, go to Egypt and stay there at least for several month until the death of Herod.

After several month in Egypt Joseph again received the instruction in a dream to go back to the land of Israel. But, arriving there they found that a son of Herod, Archelaus, was reigning in place of his father so they were warned again to withdraw to Galilee. There they finally settled in Nazareth.

Quite a story. Would you like to volunteer to live out such a story? Unexpected and even unbelievable events. Your bride pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Doesn't happen every day. You have angels appearing in dreams and, perhaps, scaring you not just a little bit, delivering warnings and commands. No peace, no clarity about future, no control over your own life.

It sounds like challenging and demanding a time, which probably cost Joseph quite a few grey hair. This is how we see what happened, from our human perspective. Perhaps this was how at least partly Joseph and Mary experienced it. It didn't look like a life in peace and without challenges, that's for sure.

When we meditate upon this story from human perspective, then we can see our limitations. We can only perceive things as they are, as we experience them. This is how we see our lives. Events happen. Some of them are pleasant, some are not. We don't see, so to speak, a big picture of our lives, God's plan unfolding.

When things don't go our way, when something bad happens – how do we react? We want to complain, we are upset, for it is not what we are looking for. We want everything go smoothly, according to our plan, when we can experience that we are in comfortable control over our lives, that we make our plans and carry them out.

But what if we were told that even when things seem to be hectic from our perspective they still are under someone's control? What if we were told they are still guided according to some much, much larger, divine plan?

Let's look at this other perspective, the divine perspective. What can we learn about it from this brief reading? In this text Matthew puts in three references to the Old Testament - "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet."

This very phrasing tells us that in this simple story there is much more going on. "To fulfill what the Lord had spoken..." To fulfill what was intended and foretold long, long time before these events.

What is Matthew saying? That none of what happened was an accident. None. Jesus and His parents leaving to Egypt, grief over lost loved ones, and even the Holy Family settling in Nazareth – none of these was something accidental.

For the Lord had already spoken about these events through His prophets. He knew what He was going to do. We can see how Matthew shows this divine perspective. If from our human perspective these were just random events, some of them even indicated that they were having problems and things didn't go well, then from the divine perspective – everything happened according to divine plan. For God is in control! 'Even hairs of your heads all are numbered.' Don't be afraid!

Let's take a look at least at one of the prophecies, the first one, about calling of God's Son from Egypt. This one comes from prophet Hosea, who lived and delivered his oracles during eight century before the Christ. What was He prophesying about?

He was foretelling another Exodus. Just to remind us. One and half millennia before the Christ, God called His son, Israel, out of Egypt and sent them to be His missionaries. He delivered them from the slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, with such a mighty signs and miracles that all the surrounding nations were afraid when they heard about it.

But Israel failed, they failed from the very beginning... Falling into idolatry, turning away from true God, following abhorrent practices of surrounding nations. That's why God the Father had to call another Son out of Egypt. His only begotten Son. That's what Hosea foretold, and that's what was fulfilled in Jesus family's travel to Egypt and back.

In Him God the Father had prepared much greater Exodus. Exodus not just for one nation, but for all nations. Exodus not from slavery to human rulers, but from the kingdom of Satan, from sin and death into eternal life together with Christ. We all are together in this Exodus.

You see, apostle Matthew shows in his gospel account how wonderfully God works to fulfill His promises, even if from our perspective surrounding events may look threatening and dangerous. He is God Creator, He is in control over time and events, over entire creation. What He had promised, He will carry out.

In the beginning I mentioned that these two perspectives, human and divine, we can also name as children's perspective and as parent's perspective. It could, indeed, be helpful to see these two perspectives with a help of family analogy.

We all are someone's children. Growing up in our lives we all have experienced our parents doing or not doing something we didn't understand and event didn't like.

Why can't we eat all biscuits at once? Why can't we play on a street? Why can't we catch brown snakes? Why do I need to do these homework? Why should I ask for forgiveness to my brother, if he started it first? You probably could continue this list on and on.

We didn't get the way our parents were leading our lives. We wanted everything to happen our way. Now we understand many of our parents' actions. May be not all. But the point is that as children we didn't know a lot, didn't understand a lot, couldn't see a big picture, and didn't know what consequences our actions may have, etc.

Our parents, on the other hand, they saw a big picture, at least much bigger that we did, they knew what can happen and what skills we will need to acquire for our lives. Ultimately, they did their best to protect us and to raise us to be ready for life. For they loved us.

Now when we look back we can see it and whole-heartedly appreciate. If we had more or less good parents, they really loved us. May be they didn't always know how to show it, maybe they didn't always know what would be the right thing to do, but they loved us as they could.

Now we are getting to the most important point we can learn from today's Gospel. We all still are children, even if we are adults. We all have our heavenly Father, and there are no words in human language that could describe His love to us. Entire Bible gives countless testimonies to His love and faithfulness. It teaches us to trust Him, and this in fact is what the 1st commandment requires. Trust.

For us the question is – how much do we trust Him, our Father? Do you trust that He will keep His promise to provide a daily bread for you, and so you are free to be generous to those in need and despair, with your time and possessions?

Do you trust that He will take care of you and your future doesn't depend on how much you have, and you can with joy serve others? For everything that our Father gives us, He gives so that we can be blessings for others. That's how it works – from Him through us to our neighbors in need.

Do you trust that He has prepared for you something incredible, there is no analogy to describe it, that He has, indeed, made you His heir and the one day... soon, you will inherit His Kingdom.

That you will live in fellowship with holy God, enjoying renewed heaven and earth, without sin and death, enjoying all the blessings for which we were created? Do you trust that it is true? If yes, do you share these wonderful news with others, so that they can receive their share among children of God? For God has called us to be His messengers for all people.

These are challenging questions. Even if the Bible reveals God's faithfulness, we are often afraid to trust Him. But regardless of how little we trust our Father in Heaven, His love and care for us, for you, have no limits.

What we read today from Matthew encourages us to trust our God. Even if we don't understand what He is doing and why. To trust Him, for He has shown His love not just in words, but in deeds.

After all this, trust is what He expects from us. To trust our Father, it means to live in peace and joy, knowing that there is One, who loves you more than His own life and Who has all the power to fulfill His promises.

Think about it – a promise requires trust. You can't receive what is promised, if you don't trust, if you don't extend your hand to receive it. If you don't come to appointed place where God's gifts are given.

We really should thank evangelists who wrote down events from Jesus' life, for now we can have these two perspectives. On the one hand, we can acknowledge that we are and remain children of our Father, we don't know everything.

On the other hand, this is also the reason for us to rejoice for we have our Father, who loves us, who is in control of everything, and who will deliver everything He has promised. You can live in trust and peace, as children who trust to their loving parents, sharing God's goodness with people around you.

Amen.