

Following God's light into Egypt

Lesson: Matthew 2:13-23

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%20:13-23>

Takeaway1: To achieve your deepest truth – God's dream for you – you have to follow God's light.

Takeaway2: Following God's light will lead you into Egypt, and God will redeem you out of it.

I'm going to tell you the point of today's message right up front: God has a dream for your life. God has a dream for your particular life. God's dream for your life is based in your deepest truth: who you are, what your gifts are, and where you can do your best in work in the world. If you follow God's light and God's leadings, you will achieve that dream.

Our struggle is not usually discovering God's light. Most of us at some point discover God's light. We experience Jesus. We experience God's providence. At some point, we discover God and we get a glimpse of what God dreams for us. **Our problem is that we resist following God's light wherever it leads. We resist following that light because we know that sometimes God's light is going to lead us where we do not want to go.**

When we attend to God's dream for our lives, if we follow God's light, **if we allow ourselves to discover how truly wonderful and glorious and powerful God made us to be, we are going to have to go places we do not want to go.** We are going to have to face challenges we do not want to face.

Our scripture lesson today calls that place of uncertainty and pain "Egypt". Sometimes we call it wilderness. I think a better word might be "wildness", because **we get so afraid of losing control, of finding our wildness. We are afraid of wildness. And that – our fear of going into Egypt, our fear of going deep into our wildness prevents a whole lot of us from achieving God's dream for our lives.**

But here's the thing, my friends. Here is the hope and the truth: **if God leads you into Egypt, God will lead you out of Egypt. And the only way to achieve God's dream for your life is to go through Egypt.**

When we look in on the holy family in today's lesson, Joseph and Mary and Jesus are living in Bethlehem. History suggests that Jesus is at least a few months old, and maybe as much as two years old. So they've been in the same place for a little while.

Of course, these months have not been easy. The mother gave birth in a stable, and that very night the little family was visited by shepherds, who were known to be unsavory types. Most recently, the family has hosted strange pagan astrologers who knelt down before the child and brought him valuable gifts of gold and expensive healing resins.

It has been a challenging few months, but some time has passed so maybe Joseph and Mary have finally found some stability. Kid Jesus is getting older; he's probably sleeping through the night, maybe eating solid food, toddling around the town. If Joseph and Mary are anything like you and me, they've probably caught up a bit on sleep, and can return to thinking about having

a normal life. **Joseph is probably thinking about expanding his business, maybe getting the family a better place to live.** Life is pretty normal.

And then, one night, Joseph is sleeping. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in his dream, and tells him to take the child, and the child's mother, and to go to Egypt, because where they are is not good for them.

Imagine yourself as Joseph for a moment. You are a good and righteous Jewish man, an observer of God's law and a upright guy. You have an infant or toddler in the house. You're just starting to get sleep again. Things are more like you expected them to be when you first planned your life, when in the middle of the night an angel of the Lord tells you in a dream to take your child and his mother to Egypt. Right now.

For those of you unfamiliar with the history of Joseph's Jewish ancestors and Egypt, let's just say that **Egypt has not always been a great place for Joseph's family.** On the one hand, Moses was brought up in the house of the Pharaoh, who did pretty well by him overall, and Joseph's ancestor Jacob took his whole family into Egypt. On the other hand, Egypt had only recently stopped being the empirical force over the world, and Joseph's ancestors were slaves in Egypt. Traditionally, **Egypt is the place you get out of, if you're a good and righteous Jewish man. Egypt is the place you don't want to go; Egypt is the place you try to leave.**

So on this night, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, and tells him to take the child and the child's mother, and go into Egypt, because where they are is not good for them. Herod's wants to kill the child. Herod wants to destroy the foundation of God's dream for Joseph's life. God tells Joseph that where they are, that stability they've found, will destroy them.

Have you ever wondered what dreams Joseph had for his life before this whole Jesus thing? There he was, engaged to be married. What do you dream of when you're relatively young and looking ahead to marriage? A good career? A nice house? A loving wife who cares for you? Children who make you proud, and take care of you and their mother in your elder years?

Whatever it is Joseph was thinking his life should be like, it probably didn't involve his fiancée being pregnant with God's child, and he probably never imagined angels and mangers and shepherds and magi and frankincense. Joseph might have been the best and most righteous man in the world. **But his own dreams for his life could not have looked like this.**

When God first gave Joseph God's dream, the terms of it were outlandish. Unbelievable. A pregnant virgin fiancée carrying the messiah. When God first gave Joseph God's dream for his life, Joseph must have been astonished. It must have taken some real mental adjustment to re-imagine his life. But he adjusted, and married her, and adopted the child as his own.

When the new dream comes, the little family has found some normalcy. **Joseph has probably started going back to his old picture of his life. Joseph is probably browsing his mental files and remembering what he had wanted before all this began. When God gives Joseph this new dream, Joseph is probably no more ready for it than he was the first time around. And now there's a baby and the baby's mother to consider. And this time, he's being told to go to Egypt, because what's waiting for them here isn't good for them.**

God had a dream for Joseph. God's dream for Joseph involved his parenting a very special child. This child is God in flesh. This child would be a healer, a teacher, a mentor, a priest, a friend, a redeemer, and a messiah. This child would be the one to show the entire world what God was like, and how to get to know and love God. God's dream for the world, that the world might know God through Jesus, required Joseph. The upbringing of Jesus to be the savior of the world required Joseph's gifts, Joseph's righteousness, Joseph's manhood. God had a dream for Joseph, and God's dream for Joseph was part of God's dream for the world.

That means that God chose Joseph to father and raise Jesus because Joseph was the right man for the task. If Joseph lived out God's dream for him, personally, he would be helping God's dream for the world come true.

And God's dream for Joseph, on that night, meant that Joseph and his child and the child's mother would need to go into the land of Egypt, the wilderness and wildness that nearly destroyed his ancestors.

For Joseph to fulfill God's dream for his life, for Joseph to live out his purpose for his life, for Joseph to help God bring about God's kingdom, Joseph had to go where he least wanted to go. Joseph had to go into Egypt.

This story isn't just about Joseph. **God has a dream for every single one of us. That dream is based on the people God made us to be -- our gifts, our goodness. God's dream for us is based on our circumstances** - whether we're born in Iraq or Iowa, the deep darknesses we struggle with, the broken places that help form who we are. **God's dream for us is based on the world's need for salvation and reconciliation.** Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand, at hand's reach. God's dream for us is our part in the reconciliation and rebuilding of the kingdom of God right here, right now. **God's dream for us helps bring it to fulfillment. God's dream for you fulfills your deepest calling and your greatest need. God's dream for you helps fulfill God's dream for the world.**

But you can only fulfill God's dream for you if you follow God's light. And God's light will always take you places you don't want to go.

Are you trying to live out God's dream for your life? If you are, and if you're like Joseph, your desires and God's dreams don't always match. **In between the times that God gives you clear pictures or instructions or leadings, you probably browse through your old mental files on what your life should be like.** You may long for the life that you thought your life would be like. Did you think it would look different? And are you clinging to what you thought it would be, lamenting some longlost dream of your own making?

To live the life God has dreamed for you, you have to let go of what you thought your life was going to be like.

Once you accept God's dreams for your life, you're going to see Egypt looming before you. **If you accept God's dream for your life, and you let God dream big dreams through you, you're going to have to go into Egypt.** You're going to have to face yourself. You're going to have to see your fears and your history. You're going to have to face your control issues, your self-doubt, your inability to ask for help. If you really follow God's light, you're going to have to

carry your own cross. You're going to have to admit your failures. You're going to have to make amends. You're going to have to fess up, and receive what's coming to you. If you follow God's light, you're going to go into Egypt and face your struggles. You're going to face your distorted mirrors and your demon voices. **If you let yourself dream God's dream for you, you will be forced to get to know yourself and to get to know God. You're going to have to really lean on God. You will need to let God love you, and lead you. You will need to let God take you into Egypt, and you will need to let God bring you out.**

You will need to let God bring you out of Egypt. There are some of us who like living in Egypt – we wallow in regret and pain. **Living in Egypt relieves us of responsibility: we can tell ourselves that it's not our fault, that God and life did this to us. In Egypt, we can wallow in self-doubt and second-guessing. But if you are going to live out God's fullest dream for your life, when you go into Egypt, you also have to let God bring you out.**

How do you survive Egypt and thrive? My brothers and my sisters, when you go into Egypt, do what Joseph did: take the child with you. Take the child of God with you. When you go into those dark places, those places you didn't ever really want to go, take Jesus with you. Take the One who is a healer. When you go into Egypt, take the One with you who is a teacher, who is a mentor, a priest, a friend. When you go into Egypt, take the One with you who can redeem even your worst moments, even your worst self. When you go into Egypt, take the child with you who is the messiah, who will save you. Take the one with you who will show you your best self, and who will show you the face of God's love for you.

God in Christ loves even you, even in Egypt, and there is nothing you can do to change that. So take that child of God's with you.

Joseph took the child and his mother into Egypt. And the angel of the Lord had been right: even though they had found some stability and some normalcy in Bethlehem, Bethlehem was not a good place for them. There is an evil that will always try to kill God's dreams for you. God's dream for the world, and for Joseph's life, would have died there. They would have died there, as part of the slaughter that comes of fear.

And when Joseph saw God's dream for his life, and accepted God's dream for the world, **God brought them out of Egypt. At first, Joseph wanted to go back where he came from, back to what he knew. He wanted to go to Israel, to his traditional home. When God brought Joseph out of Egypt, Joseph wanted to go back to his own personal picture of his life. But God sent him and the child and the child's mother to Nazareth so that God's prophecy – God's dream for them and for the whole world – would be fulfilled.**

God's wants you to live a whole and purposeful life. God has a dream for you too, and that dream for you is part of God's dream for the whole world.

This year, starting next week, we're going to help you discover and live God's dream for you. Our goal is to help you follow God's light, to develop your gifts, and to find how you can live your deepest truth, your best self. Together, we'll be taking the road of faith, following God's light.

The first part of taking that faith road will be **Charting Character**. When you're trying to take the road of faith, you've got to have a strong godly character supporting you. Scripture describes Joseph as a good and righteous man; starting next week we're going to work together on the qualities of character that promote righteousness and that sustain us on the road. After that, during Lent, we'll do some **Course Correction**. We'll try to correct some of the failures of character that can seriously derail our progress. During Holy Week, when we commemorate Jesus' last week on earth, we'll take our **failures and our sorrows and we'll leave them at the cross, to start fresh in a new life**, living into the dream that God is giving us. And after Easter, when new life comes, **we'll greenlight our lives**, start living our part of God's dream for the world.

God has a dream for your life. Take the road of discovery and joy, where you will fulfill your deepest need and your greatest possibilities. **Take the road of faith. Amen.**

Lesson: Matthew 2:13-23

Our lesson today continues the story of the first months of Jesus' life. We'll be reading from the gospel of Matthew, which is the first book of the New Testament. Open your Bibles and turn to Matthew, chapter 2; we're reading verses 13-23. If you don't have your Bible with you, there are Bibles under the chairs, and ones you can take home on the welcome table in the foyer.

(Wait for people to find their place.)

Listen for the Word of God:

Now after the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, 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" Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly 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 seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."