

## **Sermon Draft for December 28, 2026**

**Text: Matthew 2:13–23**

**Sermon: “God’s Timing”**

The celebration of the twelve days of Christmas (December 25–January 5), includes the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr (December 26); St. John, the apostle and evangelist (December 27); and the slaughter of the Holy Innocents today. (December 28). The text chosen for the First Sunday after Christmas is the reading that corresponds to the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. By celebrating St. Stephen’s martyrdom and the slaughter of the Holy Innocents during the time of Christmas, we are reminded that Jesus was born in order to carry the world’s sins to his cross and die. Christmas is not a one-day celebration about the birth of a baby; it is a yearlong celebration of God becoming man to save his creation. Any celebration of Christmas without the cross is incomplete.

It all happened so quickly! The trip to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the angels, the shepherds, and the star; then after a short time, the Wise Men, who, like the shepherds before them, fell down on their faces to worship the baby Jesus, the Lord of all creation, the promised King. But as they say, all good things must come to an end. The angel of the Lord appeared again in a dream and warned the Wise Men to return to their homes without going back to Herod.

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.”*** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 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”*** (vs 13–15).

***Out of Egypt, at Just the Right Time, God Called His Son.***

Any Jew who heard Matthew's account of Jesus' flight into Egypt would have instantly thought of the Book of Exodus and an earlier flight out of Egypt. You see, it wasn't so very long ago that the Lord came to a different Joseph by night in his dreams; it wasn't so long ago that another powerful ruler, Pharaoh, sought to kill all of the baby boys of a nation because he feared that they would challenge him someday; it wasn't so long ago that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses and sent him to lead a nation out of their slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land.

Now, the Joseph who was receiving dreams in the night was the righteous man who was wed to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The powerful ruler that sent out an edict to kill all the baby boys who might later threaten his reign was the violent and insecure King Herod, who reigned in name only, as the King of the Jews. And now, the Angel of the Lord—Jesus Christ himself—had come to lead his people out of their slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

Just as Moses' life was threatened at a tender age and he had to be hidden in a reed basket to be protected, so, too, was Jesus' life in danger before he was two years old, and he had to be hidden away in another land so that his life would be spared until his time had come. Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt; now Jesus had come to lead all people out of spiritual slavery to the Law. There was about to be another exodus; this time there wouldn't be plagues, but a cross and thorns and nails; this time it wasn't going to be one nation freed from slavery, but every tribe, nation, and people.

### **Out of Egypt, at Just the Right Time, God Called His Son.**

The exodus from Egypt prefigured for us the coming of our Savior and our freedom from sin, death, and the devil. With an outstretched arm and a mighty hand, God had delivered his people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. With an outstretched arm and a mighty hand, God is still bringing salvation to his people through his incarnate Son.

No one can alter God's plan of salvation, but many fight against it and end up rejecting his plan for themselves. The Israelites of old did just that. They didn't want to leave Egypt, especially with Moses; they preferred to remain in bondage, where at least they had food and shelter, rather than trust what their Lord was providing for them through the man he had sent. And even after they'd left, after God had worked amazing miracles to make it happen, time and time again they wanted to go back, back into slavery!

The Jews of Jesus' day also rejected God's plan of salvation. They didn't want to leave their traditions and man-made laws, especially by following the man Jesus. They preferred to remain in bondage to the Law, where they were comfortable in their sin, rather than trust that God had sent the Messiah to free and deliver them. They didn't trust that what Jesus was offering was far greater than anything they could earn or provide for themselves.

Today, people are still rejecting God's plan of salvation and the means by which he accomplishes salvation in us. Many Christian denominations no longer believe that Baptism is a means by which God creates faith and gives eternal life. Many Christian denominations no longer believe that Christ's body and blood are really present in the Supper he instituted before his death for the forgiveness of sins.

Having been set free by these blessed means of grace, they want to go back to a system that requires something more of us. Many people don't believe that a man whom God has called and ordained to be a pastor in his church can say, ***"In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins"*** (LSB, p. 293).

But these are the means by which God creates faith in Jesus Christ, forgives sins, strengthens faith, and accomplishes his salvation in us.

Rejection of these means given by God is no different from the Israelites' rejection of Moses or the Jews' rejection of Jesus himself! Nevertheless,

### **Out of Egypt, at Just the Right Time, God Called His Son.**

It is easy for us to doubt God's plan of salvation or to question why God allows things that are unpleasant or evil to happen in our world. We never have to look very hard to find an example of something unpleasant or evil, and the world is always quick to ask, "Where was God in all this?"

The text that's before us is difficult for us to take in, for only one short day after we celebrate Christmas, we hear about all these children whom King Herod murdered for no reason at all. 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.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ***“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”*** (vs. 16–18).

In the midst of the commercialization of Christmas, it’s easy for us to forget that the child Jesus came to establish peace between God and man, but he also said that his Word and Sacraments would create divisions among people and that many would stumble because of him.

In the very region where Old Testament Rachel had died giving birth to Benjamin, other children of the promise lost their lives to wicked King Herod’s sword, and their mothers wept and could not be consoled. But we cannot blame God for the death of these “innocents”; it was the wicked king who caused the anguish and death.



God was there, he saw what happened, and even in the midst of Herod's wickedness he was working to bring about his plan of salvation for the world. God is not the author of evil—man is—but he is always working to turn what is meant for evil into good.

Once Herod heard the words “King of the Jews” from the Wise Men's lips and realized that his reign might be threatened, he knew that this baby Jesus had to die. The irony is that Herod was right. Jesus did have to die, but not because Herod willed it. He had to die, but not on Herod's schedule, not until the fullness of God's time, just the right time. He had to die for Herod's sins; he had to die because of our sins. He had to die because of our doubt and our fear and our unbelief and all of our daily sins. He had to die because God knew we could never turn back to him, keep his commands, and love him on our own. As Paul says, we **“were dead in the trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1) and enemies of God by our very nature!

Since it was not yet his time, the baby Jesus was protected from Herod by God's divine intervention. Following the angel's word, Joseph led his family to safety in Egypt. God was accomplishing his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ in spite of King Herod's wickedness, and in so doing he has paid the price for Herod's sins, for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world.

Of course, this isn't where God exits the picture. He is still active in human history; he is still in control. He continues to lead little children and adults into the safety of his Church through the waters of Holy Baptism; he continues to feed and nourish his Church with his Holy Word and with the precious body and blood of his Son; he continues to announce and give his forgiveness to all who confess their sins and seek his mercy.

God's plan of salvation began when he created the heavens and the earth, and at the perfect time, he entered into his creation as a man and redeemed and saved his creation with his own blood.

***“When the fullness of time had come,” Paul writes in our Epistle, “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4–5). Then,***

**Out of Egypt, at Just the Right Time, God Called His Son** for the salvation of the world. That salvation has been accomplished; it is, as Jesus said, “finished,” and one day soon he will come again and call all believers to himself, to be with him in paradise forever! God has promised it, and as he has shown, he will do it!

Amen