

## JESUS' MOTHER ATTITUDE TO THE VICTIMS OF THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

In the Gospel of Matthew we read that King Herod killed all the baby boys of two and under in Bethlehem because astrologers told him the Messiah, his rival, was born there.

Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus were in Bethlehem since the birth of Jesus the Messiah.

The astrologers visited them there and after they left the "holy" family went into hiding in Egypt for they were informed that Herod was going to have the child murdered.

Herod's soldiers invaded the village and killed all boys two and under in it and in its environs.

Matthew makes no comment on the strangeness of Herod having the children in Bethlehem and roundabout when he had no reason to think the baby was still there. Some time had elapsed since the birth. Why not kill all the boys two and under in the nation to make sure?

Here is the account:

Revised Standard Version (RSV) Matthew 2

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying,

2 "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet:

6 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; 8 and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

9 When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy;

11 and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

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 till 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 fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, 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 which 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, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.”

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,

20 “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.

Interesting story!

\* Mary and Joseph escaped to Egypt with baby Jesus. The massacre was their fault.

Matthew infers that Mary and Joseph hid the child and his identity all the time they were in Bethlehem. Why else would Herod have had to order the slaughter of all the babies of Bethlehem? It looks like there was no child in the area suspected of being the Messiah and nobody could even tell Herod's men that a couple had vanished with a child.

Mary and Joseph knew from the magi that Herod and the city were disturbed at the news of the birth. They knew that Herod and Jerusalem believed that baby was Herod’s rival. They knew that Herod told the magi to come back and say where the baby was. They knew that he did not want to know that for a noble reason.

They should have left Bethlehem when the astrologers told them that Herod knew about the child. They should have sent them back to him to tell him that the family had fled. That was the kindest solution.

They could have sent Herod a letter that they were gone and not to bother sending his men in search of the child.

They could have told others that their baby was the Messiah and then left so that those people would be able to tell Herod and his men that they were too late if they came looking.

Mary and Joseph could have told the Magi to go back and tell Herod they had made a mistake and there was no child. Herod only attacked the babies because the magi were not coming back and he had no way of knowing who the right child was. Obviously, the Magi must have dressed like ordinary Israelites - they didn't stand out like they do on the Christmas cards!

Joseph and Mary knew what Herod was like. They knew that if he was going to kill the infant Messiah that he would have to kill all the male infants for nobody knew which was which. They knew the paranoid beast would plot to kill their child that way for he couldn't stomach rivals. They didn't care.

\* Why did Herod and his men who knew about the star not follow it too? Why did nobody expect them to appear at the place where the child was? It seems that Mary and Joseph must have expected him to if there was a star. They were safe and that was all they cared about. They didn't warn anybody else!

\* It was only when Herod started to have Bethlehem searched for the baby Jesus, that Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with the child. When they left it so late instead of going earlier they were not scared of Herod and confident that they would escape. They had a safe haven when they could run at the last minute. Their tardiness resulted only in death for others.

Mary and Joseph should have warned the other villagers about Herod’s plan to kill the babies. Joseph had heard all about it in a dream. When they had such a good hiding place, telling would not have led to their own destruction.

\* Mary and Joseph or both could have stayed to stop the massacre and sent the infant away with somebody else. If they had told the soldiers about the visit of the magi who Herod had also met they could have convinced them and averted the massacre.

Herod would not have been able to tell from the Bethlehem census if there was a missing baby for Mary was pregnant when the census was taken. But if there had been a census as only Luke reports, there would have been no massacre because there would have been too many people visiting the town to enrol who could have had babies there and gone home. There was no point in searching Bethlehem for a baby that was probably already gone. If Herod really massacred the baby boys of Bethlehem he would have had to go after all the families that visited Bethlehem too. There is no evidence at all that the extremely improbable massacre really happened.

Mary and Joseph just didn't give a toss about the children who died so they were as hard-hearted as a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They were worse than Herod for they knew they could get away with what they wanted to happen better than even Herod could and the dirty work would be Herod's.

The story of the massacre is incoherent. As paranoid as Herod was, he was not going to get the people to go with him in a bid to eradicate a Messiah who was only a baby with poor parents with no verifiable royal bloodline and who might not have been in Bethlehem any more. If he had been that demented he wouldn't have been able to rule at all. It is only nonsense to point to his murder of his beloved Mariamme as evidence that he lashed out murderously at all possible contenders or conspirators. Random attacks over his paranoia were not his style. If he listened to astrologers then it was time for the straitjacket.

But it remains true that Matthew was sure that Mary and Joseph were evil people and guilty of what he accused them of. If they did not cause a massacre then their movements could have caused one. These movements could be history. Matthew believed that they were capable of tremendous frightful evil and that is the important thing even if the story is legendary.