

R For those of you who were here on Christmas, you'll remember that I said the names listed in the genealogy of Jesus and the names in the Roman Canon Eucharistic Prayer tell us a story. However, in order to understand those stories, we have to do the research: what did the men and women attached to those names do or fail to do? Today's gospel gives us some more names: Herod, Joseph, the magi, Archelaus, Egypt, and although they are named, Mary and Jesus. Those names are mentioned as part of a narrative, but the gospel account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt is not the full story. Three names tell us the fuller story but if we want to begin to understand the whole story, we have to put in the time and do the research. The names that open our way to the whole story are Joseph, Egypt, and Jesus—but with Jesus we need to remember that “Jesus” comes from the Greek form of his name. The Greek form of that name is the equivalent of the Hebrew name Yeshua—Joshua. The names Joseph, Egypt, and Joshua tell us a story that unfolded over the course of around five hundred years—accounting for Joseph's lifespan and the journey to the promised land after the Hebrews escaped slavery in Egypt.

I don't have time to tell the whole story now, but remember that the Old Testament Joseph was the favorite of his father's sons. His older brothers hated him and one day decided to kill him. Instead, one of the brothers suggested they sell Joseph to some passing traders who then sold him to an officer of the Pharaoh in Egypt. The Pharaoh came to trust Joseph to the point that he put Joseph in charge of the stores of food. When a famine hit the land, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in search of food for their families and it was Joseph they had to deal with. They didn't recognize him but he recognized them. Eventually, Joseph revealed his identity to them, they were reconciled and they went back home, got their father Jacob and their families and moved to Egypt. After Jacob died, the brothers feared Joseph would finally get revenge but instead he told them that what they had intended for evil—selling him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver—God intended for good: he put Joseph in a position where he would be able to save his entire family, even the brothers who had wanted him dead.

Genesis ends on a cliffhanger—the Hebrews are in Egypt which history tells us is not a good place for them to be. Years go by. Joseph and his buddy the Pharaoh die. A new Pharaoh who knew nothing of Joseph came to power and the Hebrews entered into approximately 400 years of slavery. Moses came along and led them out of Egypt—across the Red Sea— and through the wilderness for 40 years, going around the promised land until they finally ended up on the east

bank of the Jordan river. Moses died east of the Jordan and Joshua took over, completing the exodus by leading the people across the Jordan and into the promised land, west of the river.

Joseph, Moses, and Joshua are all types—foreshadowings—of Jesus. The Old Testament exodus event really began with old Joseph's arrival in Egypt and the events that led up to it. Even though Moses led them out of Egypt and Joshua led them into the geographic promised land, the exodus was not complete. They had escaped slavery to the Egyptians but all of humankind was still enslaved by the devil, sin, and death. The flight of the holy family into Egypt in today's gospel was a sign that the true fulfillment of the exodus had begun. A new Joseph, and—more importantly—a new Joseph/Moses/Joshua—was fleeing death to find refuge in Egypt. The family would return to Nazareth when Jesus was still a child but then, as an adult, Jesus would go to the east side of the Jordan where Moses had died and complete the exodus by crossing back into the Promised Land where he would be arrested and crucified. Jesus' crucifixion is the fulfillment of the exodus because it was by his death and resurrection we are freed from slavery to sin.

What can we take away from this? First, salvation history is full of patterns—God put them there for us to see because he wants us to know them so that we can better know him. You don't have to be a theologian or scripture scholar to see those patterns but it does take some time and effort. Hopefully we will spend eternity with God in heaven. Wouldn't it be nice to know him a little bit better before we get there? Second, God can bring something good out of even the worst evil. Remember what I said about Joseph and his brothers. Think about what came out of Jesus' death—meaning our salvation. Sometimes it takes generations, but sometimes it doesn't. Are we aware of how God has done this for us? If not, maybe it is because we haven't been looking hard enough at the patterns of our lives. If God is waiting to act, it is because he has something much greater in mind for us and it takes time to bring it to completion. He will do it. The life of Jesus from his humble birth to his horrible crucifixion to his glorious resurrection proves that works in miraculous and unexpected ways.