

Game Of Thrones

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 15, 2013 • Pastor Chris Lankford

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

~Isaiah 60:2-3 (ESV)

1) A Devouring Dragon

- A) The miraculous story of Jesus Christ's birth is eloquently detailed against the backdrop of the census which brings Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem (see map), a trek of roughly 90-100 miles (Luke 2:1-20). The trip, probably by caravan with others, would have taken Joseph and an at-least-half-term-pregnant Mary (cf. Luke 1:56) about a week.
- B) It would be easy, if we were only reading Luke, to think that Jesus Christ came into the world in a very gentle and peaceful environment ("the cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes..."). But the fact is, when Jesus Christ was born, He brought a cosmic bloody battle of epic magnitude to center stage on earth!
- C) Revelation 12:4-5 notes that the great dragon (the devil, Satan), was set to devour baby Jesus from the beginning! The peaceful scene of Jesus' birth, is in reality, one filled with confusion, brutality, political intrigue, and heartbreaking wickedness.

2) Joseph The Just

- A) Is there any doubt that Joseph is thoroughly confused as he notices Mary's pregnancy (Matthew 1:18-25)? Whatever her story, Joseph doesn't believe Mary, and chooses to quietly "get rid of her" through divorce (1:19). Even though Joseph is "just" (Law-abiding, righteous), he chooses compassionate actions. But God's purposes are not satisfied simply by justice and compassion! God's purposes are deeper, rearranging Joseph's life to the Gospel!
- B) Rather than abandon Mary (and also Jesus) to a disgraced and unsupported life, Joseph obediently responds to God's Gospel plan (1:20-23) revealed to him by the angel. Joseph will be the step-father to Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), "God with us" (see also John 1:1, 14)!
- C) A great tragedy is averted! The "just and compassionate" Joseph secures the lives of both Mary and Jesus Christ, an essential for a mother and child in the ancient world! Finally! Peace on earth, goodwill toward men! Right? Well, not so much... The dragon never gives up so easily. Despite outward appearances of a quiet birth in Bethlehem, the dragon rages against God, attempting to consume Jesus again and again (and again)!

3) In The Days Of Herod The King...

- A) Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1) was the Adolf Hitler of his day. On the one hand, Herod was one of the great builders and engineers of his day. He was a clever and powerful politician, helping those whose lives were wrecked by natural disasters. Herod's lineage was half-Jewish and half-Edomite, and his life tried to serve both foreign and national purposes.
- B) Herod was also a megalomaniac, taxing his people heavily to build extraordinary seaports, fortresses (including Masada), palatial residencies, and the expansion of the Jewish Temple (see map & graphic). The modern Western "Wailing" Wall was partially built by King Herod.
- C) Herod was also a paranoid wack-job, killing three of his own sons! He murdered thousands of potential enemies, including his favorite wife, Marriamne (#1 out of ten ☺). She objected to Herod's plan to have her executed if he did not return from battle. Herod felt his death would be much worse knowing she would marry another man. Ironically, her objections led to her eventual execution for sedition (attempting to overthrow the king).
- D) Caesar Augustus, Emperor of Rome, once jokingly stated to his Senate, "it is better to be Herod's swine, than to be his son..." Knowing this should COMPLETELY change the way we read Matthew 2:1, "in the days of Herod the king..."

4) Worship And Wealth From Arabia

- A) The wise men (also known as "magi") from the East come to Jerusalem (in response to Numbers 24:17?) seeking the "king of the Jews" (2:2). They have come following a star (an unspecified luminary in the heavens), but have lost sight of the light, which has led them to unintentionally cause social and religious upheaval in Jerusalem (2:3-4).
- B) Herod, as noted, was a psychotic-murdering-narcissist whose treacherous reign as king was immediately threatened by the inquiry of the wise men. Herod assembled the "chief priests and scribes" (note the religious/political bedfellows) who inform him that "Christ" (Messiah) would come out of Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2). Simultaneously, the religious leaders assure Herod they have no knowledge of Messiah's arrival (2:5-6; cf. John 7:40-52).
- C) Herod learns the wise men have been observing the light of the king for two years (2:7, 16), and requests they inform him of Christ's whereabouts so Herod can worship him (2:8). The wise men head out, excitedly seeing the star again as it leads them to the exact location of Jesus the Christ (2:9-10) where they bow down in worship to 2-year-old-ish Jesus (2:11) and give him three very valuable gifts (cf. Isaiah 60:5-6, Arabian gold, frankincense, myrrh).
- D) Warned in a dream, the wise men avoid returning to Herod (2:12). Unsuprisingly, Herod's motives are revealed to be insanely (Satanic) and tragically murderous (2:16-18).

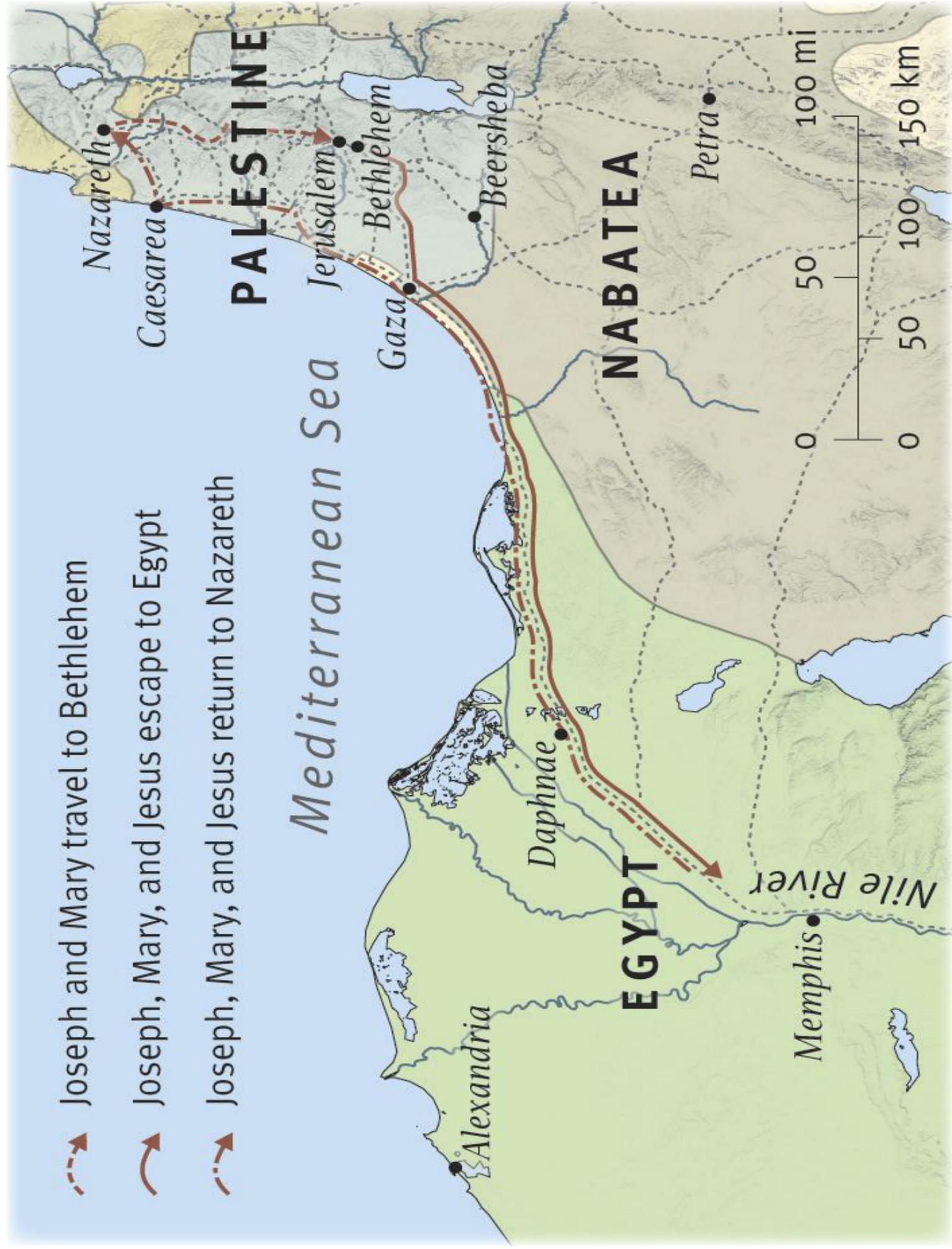
5) Protection And Provision In Egypt

- A) Warned in a dream, Joseph and Mary flee with Jesus to Egypt (2:13-15, cf. Hosea 11:1) to avoid Herod's insane infanticide (2:16-18). Herod is soon dead (2:19-20), bringing Joseph and Mary back to Israel (2:21). Led by God (2:19, 22), Joseph returns to Nazareth of Galilee, where Jesus will come of age (Luke 2:52), and begin a public ministry in nearby Cana at a family wedding, replacing flavorless water with new and fruitful Gospel wine (John 2:1-11).

➤ Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem

➤ Joseph, Mary, and Jesus escape to Egypt

➤ Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return to Nazareth



THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN THE TIME OF JESUS

Herod's Temple Mount was the focal point of Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. Sitting atop Jerusalem's north-eastern ridge, it occupied one-sixth of the city's area. Under Herod the Great, the Temple Mount's foundation was expanded to encompass approximately 1.5 million square feet (140,000 square meters). Its foundational walls were constructed using gigantic stones, the largest found being 45 feet long, 11.5 feet high, and 12 feet thick (13.7 m by 3.5 m by 3.7 m).

Wilson's Arch formed a bridge over the Tyropoeon Valley below, leading from the Temple Mount to the Hermonen Palace. A section of the western wall south of Wilson's Arch (187 feet/57 m long, sometimes called the Walling Wall) has been a place of prayer for Jews for the last 700 years. The lowest seven stone courses, which can be seen at ground level are Herodian.

The early square Temple Mount preserved its identity as a separate area with its own walls and gates.

The Antonia Fortress was where Herod (and later the Romans) commanded the garrison in order to protect the temple and to suppress religiously motivated rebellion.

Herod's Temple (for a detailed cutaway drawing, see p. 1943)

The Court of the Women was the farthest point of the inner temple complex that women could enter.

The Pool of Israel was probably used to wash sacrificial animals before they were led to the Temple Mount.

Robinson's Arch and its massive stairway led from the Tyropoeon Street below up to the Royal Stoa.

The Double Gate and its monumental stairway

A ritual bath-house for pilgrims to cleanse before entering the temple precincts

A Council House for legal proceedings

The Triple Gate and its stairway

Small shops, which had a narrow street built above them, were built along the southern wall of the Temple Mount.

The soqey (a low, latticed screen or railing) prohibited Gentiles or non-purified Jews from entering the temple courts.

The Court of the Gentiles was the area between the soqey and the outer walls of the early square Temple Mount.

The Royal Stoa was a 912-foot-long (278 m) portico, containing four rows of 40 columns. The Sanhedrin met in the central apse after c. A.D. 30. This may have been where Jesus cleaned the temple. The southeast corner overlooking the Kidron Valley created a drop of 140 feet (43 m) to the street below, and 300 feet (91 m) to the valley below. This may be the "pinnacle of the temple" mentioned in Matt. 4:5 and Luke 4:9.

The golden Gate, then known as the Shushan Gate

Stairs descended from the Miser Gate into the Kidron Valley and eventually went up to the Mount of Olives.

Solomon's Porch, the portico built along the eastern wall, was a place of congregation (cf. John 10:23; Acts 3:11).

The eastern city wall of Jerusalem

Temple Mount Architectural Plan

