

# The Land of Beginning Again

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## Bible Reading

Now after they 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." (*Matthew 2:13-23*)

## Sermon

*Joseph took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)*

What a wonderful dream: "The Land of Beginning Again." Can you picture it? Here is my picture: A land of sunny skies with occasional white fleecy clouds. Striking but brief thunder showers expressing the power of nature and nourishing the ground. High snow-capped mountains. Emerald or azure lakes. Turbulent mountain streams with majestic waterfalls. Quiet rivers with jumping fish. Woodlands with towering trees forming cathedral arches, and wind whispering high in their branches.

It is a picture that symbolizes perfection. An image that speaks of clear decisions, lofty ideals, life full of determination and conviction. Life at peace with ourselves, our God, and our fellow people. Life that has been rid of error, mistakes, selfishness, greed, and thoughtlessness. In a land where we would always be

right and never be wrong there would be no turning back?no need to turn back; no regrets, no feelings of guilt or shame. Confidence would walk with us each step of the way, and uncertainty would be forever banished; for all decisions and actions would be right.

To enter such a "Land of Beginning Again" would mean that all past mistakes, errors, and misdeeds would be forever wiped out. We would begin again in the land of fantasy, devoid of error or wrong, such as we have just described: a "Land of Beginning Again." That is, of course, exactly what it is: fantasy. Fantasy is neither good nor bad. What we do with determines its value.

We have now left behind the "magic world" of Christmas. Its memories, its poignant moments, its expressions of love will linger with us. Shortly, the holiday season will be behind us and we shall be gripped in the routines of business, homemaking, school, and busy rounds of committees and diversions. We will be ready to test the inspiration of the moments we have recently experienced.

There were those same inspiring moments for Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men. Something had happened that would change their lives, and the lives of millions of people. But the shepherds returned to their flocks. The wise men returned to their homes and their searching.

The holy family, too, returned to the daily tasks of personal maintenance. And they faced the stark realities of the world with a rude shock. Warned in a dream that Herod sought to kill the child, they departed by night for Egypt. There Jesus spent his first years in a land noted for its worldliness, where Israel had toiled as slaves. Away from his home and people. Away from a land that was the center of godly prophecy. Jesus and his family had to leave behind the glorious moments of his birth; the appointed land in which he was to teach, heal, and fulfill his purpose in coming. They had to "begin again" with the down-to-earth facts of life.

As each new year begins, we usually indulge in some fantasies. We may write them down as resolutions, trying to capture them in reality and thus challenge ourselves to abide by them. We may think about them, usually resolving to work toward certain changes in our life patterns.

This is the time of beginning again. It is a land of fantasy in which, for a while, we dwell. When through fantasy we gain the inspiration to work toward reordering certain aspects of our lives, it is good. But let us be aware that resolutions are only as good or effective as we ourselves are willing to make them. Writing them down gives them no more strength than our inner resolve.

The questions we must ask are: Do we really want to change? Do we really desire to be different? What is the real reason for us to change? Perhaps we have come to feel that there is a bit of magic about New Year's day. Make the resolve and we will change. But our unfulfilled resolutions tell us this is not true. It is as much a fantasy as is the possibility of "A Land of Beginning Again."

The holy family, and Jesus himself, found that they had to live with the world of reality, a world cruel, uncaring, and earthly in most of its ways. A world inhabited by people who do err, do make mistakes, do disregard others for their own gain.

And the reality for us is that we must live in a world of reality. We must live with our mistakes. We must live with the fact that we will make more mistakes. We must accept that we can learn from our mistakes and failures?and that this is their greatest value. We each are what we are today both because of our successes and because of our failures. It cannot be otherwise.

The important question is: What do I do with myself now, as I am? It is precisely at this point that the Lord picks us up and leads us by the hand. Not when we are better. Not when the past has changed. Not when we show we can be better. Not when resolutions are fulfilled . . . but now!

We never go back! There is no land of beginning again? except that each moment is fresh and new, and we live in that moment. The process of change takes place now. This very moment. And it goes on all our lives, every moment of our lives.

It is valid and useful to live for a while in the fantasy land of beginning again. Our lives are enriched by what our imaginations enable us to dream about. A special reminder of our need to dream of our best in hope and life and faith--which every new year provides--offers an impetus to rethink our way of life.

But let there be no regrets, no feelings of guilt, no pining over wasted hours or years. Now is the time to live! Now is the time to act! For this moment is always the Land of Beginning Again.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we have celebrated your new birth among us. Show us that your birth takes place in us every day, even every moment, as we look to you in thought and prayer, and open ourselves up to your birth and your growing presence among us right now! Amen.

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