

“When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
 and out of Egypt I called my son.  
 2 But the more I called Israel,  
 the further they went from me.  
 They sacrificed to the Baals  
 and they burned incense to images.  
 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
 taking them by the arms;  
 but they did not realize  
 it was I who healed them.  
 4 I led them with cords of human kindness,  
 with ties of love;  
 I lifted the yoke from their neck  
 and bent down to feed them.  
 5 “Will they not return to Egypt  
 and will not Assyria rule over them  
 because they refuse to repent?  
 6 Swords will flash in their cities,  
 will destroy the bars of their gates  
 and put an end to their plans.  
 7 My people are determined to turn from me.  
 Even if they call to the Most High,  
 he will by no means exalt them. (NIV84)

Theme: God Sent his Son to Save his Sons.

In this day and age, things change quickly. Just a few short days ago we were celebrating the birth of our Savior. Over 20 kids sat up here and recited the Christmas story. They told us about the birth of a little baby boy, who was the son of God come down to this earth to save us. It was a celebration of a new life. But things change quickly. We just celebrated a birth—but today we talk about death and the escape from death.

It may seem strange, but as we will see, death is actually a fitting topic for a few days after Christmas. For today we see that God sent his Son to save his sons from death.

Out of his grace, God chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be his very own.. He blessed Jacob with a large family—12 sons in all. He would lead Jacob, also known as Israel, and his family to settle in Egypt. At that time there were 72 Israelites, as they came to be known. During the 400 years that followed the Israelites greatly increased in number. Conservative estimates figure that there were around two million Israelites 400 years after the 72 first arrived. God raised these people. He chose them as his own and took care of them. He greatly blessed them and made them a large prosperous nation. Through the prophet Hosea God recalls what he did for the Israelites, **It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.**

But the Israelites still faced a major problem. They were slaves. Overtime the Egyptians began to abuse the children of Jacob. They were forced into hard work. They weren’t allowed to leave. And when they tried to leave, things only got worse. So God chose a man named, Moses, to lead his people out of slavery. Through a series of 10 plagues God made Pharaoh let his free workforce go. And when they Egyptians changed their minds, God drowned the most powerful army in the world in the Red Sea. God watched over, cared for, and protected the Israelites like a Father would his own son.

But the Israelites rebelled against him. The Lord explains through Hosea, **The more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.** They fell into the same sins of the countries around them. They made god with their own hands. Then they proceeded to worship those imagines. They worshiped them as gods. They offered sacrifices to them—sometimes those sacrifices were there own sons and daughters. They joined in ritual orgies in order to please fertility gods. They prayed to these gods as if they were actually real, could hear them, and had the power to do something about it. They rejected God and went after other gods. Overtime, they eventually forgot about the one true God and everything he had one for them. Remember earlier when Hosea said that God taught them how to walk and so on? Do you remember how the Israelites reacted to

God's love? **They did not realize it was I who healed them.** They had rejected him so thoroughly, they completely forgot about all the love he showed them. Sure, they still had some sense of the Lord. But for the most part all they held onto were some laws and regulations that they thought they could use to please the Lord. Some were doing and saying the right things, but they were just going through the motions. Their hearts weren't truly in it. Despite numerous warnings and encouragements from the prophets, the majority of God's children refused to praise his name.

Sounds similar doesn't it? Our pattern is the same. You were chosen by God by his grace. For many of you, he welcomed you into his family at a young age through the waters of baptism. He made you his own. He washed your sins away, brought you to faith, and clothed you in the robe of Christ's righteousness, or holiness. He loves you and cares for you. He has brought you up in his Word and has increased your knowledge of him and faith in him as your Savior.

But we rebel against the Lord. Sure we may not offer sacrifices or prayers to false gods, but we still pursue other gods. Gods like money, happiness, or a good reputation in the eyes of the world. We make things in our lives more important than God. They may even be good things—like our jobs, families, or hobbies. But those things often trump God and his Word. We find ourselves too busy to attend worship every week, once a week—let alone during special services during the middle of the week. We have too much going on to read our Bibles at home or to study his Word in Bible Class. It's either that, or we simply don't care enough. And soon we forget some of what God has done for us. And we often fail to realize all the love he has shown to us. Like the Israelites we too have rebelled against God.

The Israelites would be punished for their sins. **Will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.** Because of their sins, from which they refused to repent, God would punish his children. Their country would be destroyed. Many of them would be killed. The others would be ripped from their homes. They would be forced into exile by the Assyrians.

We deserve a worse fate. Because of our sin and rebellion we deserve to die as well. But not just a physical death. We deserve to die eternally. For each and every one of our sins, eternal damnation is what we deserve.

That is why God sent his Son. Just a few short days ago God sent his one and only Son. This Son became one of us. He was born to save us. God became man to serve as our substitute—to suffer and die in our place. He lived a perfect life so that he could give it to us. Then he rose from the dead and promises that all who believe in him will live with him forever, even though they die.

For thousands of years Satan waited for Christ to be revealed. Like everyone else, he had to wait to see how the Promised Messiah would be. And when he was finally born, Satan sought an opportunity to launch an attack. You may remember the background of our gospel for today, but let me remind you anyway. The Magi met with Herod to find out where the king of the Jews was born. Herod, threatened by this new king, found out when this child was born and the place—Bethlehem. He then proceeded to have all the boys 2 years and younger murdered in an incident we call, the massacre of the innocents. Then our gospel picks up the story. God wanted to save Jesus' life, so he came to Joseph in a dream and had him flee to Egypt. And eventually Jesus and his family would return from Egypt to live in Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Something similar happened almost 1500 years before. God brought his people out of Egypt, as we already mentioned. Hosea, who lived roughly halfway between the escape from Egypt and the birth of Christ, saw the exodus from Egypt as an example of God's love. Mathew, through the Holy Spirit, saw it as a type, or foreshadowing of Christ. In our gospel for today, Matthew says that Jesus' coming out of Egypt fulfills the prophecy of Hosea in our text for today. So, Out of Egypt I have called my son, doesn't just refer to the time when God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt; but it also refers to the time when Jesus fled to Egypt only to return to Nazareth. In fact the Israelites exodus from Egypt points us to Christ's trip to Egypt. It foreshadows this event.

This whole event shows us that God is in control. He moves the pieces of history like a chess board. He makes sure things happen just the way he desires. Satan sought to kill Christ before he had the opportunity to save us. But God protected his Son by telling Joseph to take him to Egypt. And so God moved the pieces of history to fulfill this prophecy from Hosea. And in doing so, God saved us.

After all, that is what Christmas is all about. Sure we celebrate the birth of God's son. The Word incarnate. God becoming man. But all of that wouldn't be that big of a deal, if he hadn't accomplished anything. We celebrate the birth of God for a reason. It is also the birth of our Savior. That is why the birth of Jesus is such a big deal. Not only is it the birth of God, but it is the birth of the one who would give up his life to save us.

He was born to save the whole world from their sins. That includes me and you. That includes the rebellious Israelites. Although God punished the Israelites, he still showed love to them. Even though they rebelled against him, he still gave up his one and only Son so that he could suffer and die for their sins. God still loves those who rebel against him. The same stands for you and me. God's Son was sent for us. He was born to save us from our sins.

And so God protected him. Jesus, although he was God and had power over all things, made himself powerless. He had to rely on his earthly father to save his life. And by saving his life, God saved ours as well. And he made us his sons once again. For we became children of the devil. And we were born as enemies of God. But through Christ our sins, which separate us from God, have been removed. We have been made his own. We are now his own dear children. We are his heirs who will inherit eternal life.

And so we celebrate Christmas. For God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save his sons, us. He saved us and made us his own sons and heirs once again. The mindset changes quickly, and people quickly move on from Christmas. It may seem as if we have moved on from Christmas today too—after all we are talking about death and rebellion. But we haven't. The message is still the same—sin and grace; our sin, God's grace. For Christ's flight into Egypt and escape from death reminds us that we rebel against God, yet Christ was sent to save us. Christ's escape from death reminds us that Christ delivers us from death as he makes us his children. It reminds us that Christ was born to save us. Amen.