

## January 1

### *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh*

... and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. — Matt. 2:11.

**Read: Matt. 2:1-12**

**Sing: Ps. 68:11**

Last night, on New Year's Eve, it was the last time in the face of a fleeting year that God and our souls met each other. And when we felt He was there, did we then not discover two things in His presence? In the first place, from the beginning to the end of the year, *He* had worked differently than *we* had expected, and in addition to this, that we had spoken, prayed, and worked differently than we had promised Him in the beginning of the year? Behold, again we have a new beginning, and again we have spoken and prayed. Perhaps our prayers were very smooth this morning, without any stammering, even though we may have confessed that we did stammer. Perhaps we even told God that this year we would sacrifice to Him our gold, our frankincense, and our myrrh, the best and most noble things of our life. But later, when we come to the end again, will God's work also then not prove to be different than we hope for now? And we ourselves, will we still *redeem* our promises, if at the hour of our sacrificial *deed*, God's way again will be completely different than we in the hour of our vows expected?

Now hear what the wise men did. They came all the way from the east to greet the Child. They had filled their treasure bags with beautiful presents. They

thought that they would find a King who had many people standing behind Him, and who had already prepared a throne for Himself. Who would not be glad to carry presents to a palace? "For whoever has, to him more will be given." For this reason, the wise men came with gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honour the King. But that was only at the hour of promise. Promises are not expensive. Yet, how God tested them when they found the Child! There was no throne for Him. And there were no people either. Their star did not rest above a *palace*. Then they thought in their heart of another truth, "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away." They would not have said it in these words, yet the question would have burned in their hearts, "Should we take the treasures back again? The King is not what we dreamt . . ." But God overcame them: they truly opened their treasure bags for Him and all was indeed for Him! The wise men understood that it is easy to *imagine* giving gifts to a Lord of our imagination, but it is difficult to give treasures to a King who makes no effort to be as we thought Him to be.

Thus, we also know that it is easy to promise our greatest possessions to God. That is correct: let us fill our treasure bags to the brim for Him! But let us also leave Him the right to continually say to us: "I am who I am." For if we do not let go of the God of our imagination for the God of reality, truly, our treasures will perish with us. Only because the true sacrifice is prepared by God Himself is it possible to bring a real sacrifice to the true God. *As long as we sacrifice with open eyes.*

## January 2

### *A Silent Departure*

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.  
— Matt. 2:12.

**Read: Ps. 72:1-11**

**Sing: Ps. 72:6**

Usually, we read the story of the wise men in this way: we admire God, who made them travel along the highway, and we resign ourselves to the unavoidable, that they had to depart via a back road, stealthily, with the ferry across the Jordan, in a quiet departure. Why did Herod have to spoil the gospel of God?

But even though it be far from us to claim that Herod is free of guilt, we do not believe in a God who lets Himself be forced by this Edomite to re-route the stream of salvation and revelation into a little stream, which God would not have dug out if Herod had not been there. Soon we realize that the silent departure of the wise men was not a loss to the evangelist with his glowing story. Instead, the gospel of God's Self-revelation finds its crowning factor in the wise men of the east. When those wise men take a detour to go back to their own country, God's plan was not cut short along the way, but was fully accomplished! Before and after the wise men came from the east to the west, many had come and would come to find the King of the west, as it used to be said. The east of that time looked toward the west because it was very tired of the sacrifices to the gods, while from the west the light

would arise over the world. This hunger for something new even caused a whole royal family to move to the west. At that time, they decorated the temple of Jerusalem with gold and burned incense: for wasn't Jerusalem a great city? Yet, the wise men who came to Bethlehem left their gold and frankincense in the back of a house, poor and empty, far from the temple. For God caused them to believe in a King who indeed came from the west but would rule over the east and over all the nations. That is why, also in the east, they could wait for Him. Worship must be in spirit and in truth. When they came along the highway, their hearts were still going astray; they also were looking for a King in the west. And they wondered, how would the king of the west make do without the west of the king? But soon they would return via a detour, a back road. Then God taught them two things during every step along that starless road. First, this King did not need any people or country to become king because He *Himself makes His* people and *prepares* His country as well. Second, he who worships the King should go in quietude. Jerusalem would have honoured them as discoverers if they had returned to it. But they themselves found it very simple: they had not discovered, but had been discovered, discovered by that King and His God. And doesn't that indeed cause one to be very quiet and to move with utmost care? For silence endures prayer and prayers endure silence. And he who offers frankincense should not desire the smoke of frankincense for himself. *The offering must be perfect: all the fragrance of the frankincense must go to Jesus.*

## January 3

### *The Other Way*

... they departed into their own country another way. — Matt. 2:12.  
So he went another way ... — 1 Kings 13:10.

**Read: 1 Kings 13:1-10**

**Sing: Ps. 119:45**

Various people have mentioned that the wise men of the east were not the only ones who returned along another way than the way by which they had come. The same is told us of a wise man, a certain Tiridates, who at a later date came from the east to the west to seek the rescuer of the world in the imperial palace at Rome. Several centuries earlier, the man of God who was sent from Judah to fling his flaming curses against the altar of the false religion, built by Jeroboam in Bethel, also returned along another way than the one by which he had come. Some people say: "The one copied the other."

After some reflection, we may be grateful for the reminder of the similarity between the wise men from the east and the man of God from Judah. Both chose *an other way*. And by that, they made the people with whom they wanted no fellowship *ashamed*. The man of God, who startled Bethel with his strict preaching of repentance, had to immediately move on along an other way. By doing so he showed the sinful Bethel that they no longer deserved a prophet of God. Thus, the return of the wise men from the east was also a slap in the face of Herod, his court, and his scribes: they were not worthy, the hypocrites, of the fellowship of God's favoured ones ...

Now notice the double outcome the decision of taking the other way had for the souls of the unfaithful. In Bethel there lived a prophet who had endured the apostasy for a long time ... because he had neglected to protest against the apostasy of Jeroboam's well paid priests. When that man heard that the messenger of repentance had left Judah by another way, his conscience accused him, for this was also a humiliation for him. He saddled his donkey and tried to soothe his conscience by calling the man of God back for a cordial visit. It was wrong, certainly! But, at least, that man *was ashamed of himself, his conscience could still condemn him*. But Herod ... O, that Herod! When *he* noticed that the wise men could not entrust their pious secret of the Messiah to him, he also felt the slap in his face. But *his* conscience was sealed up. He was full of anger. He took the sword and determined to kill the Child.

At the time of the old prophet living in Bethel, the prophecy was still in the *beginning* of its apostasy ... and one could still be ashamed. But in the days of Herod the prophecy had been completely spoiled ... and one was *no longer ashamed*. Let us be careful with God and His Word. Whoever stains the revealed Word of God with his hostile ideas will obtain a conscience of stone; and the hardening of hearts makes of those who search the Scriptures men who lift up the sword against God and His Anointed. "The other way" bypasses the official church. Out of himself no one who has seen God is allowed to choose that way. *But when God Himself directs the stream of salvation in a bypass around Jerusalem, the church has to take note: it is judgment.*

## January 4

### *Joseph Exhorted*

And on their having withdrawn, lo, a messenger of the Lord does appear in a dream to Joseph . . . — Matt. 2:13.

**Read: Matt. 2:13-18**

**Sing: Ps. 40:3**

God's words never say anything superfluously. In all He says, there is meaning; there is nothing that just happens to be. When God writes a letter, the *address* itself is already part of it.

You can see that with Joseph. God has a message about the Child Jesus. That heavenly message is *not directed to Mary, but to Joseph*. And now our hearts will ask, "Should not Mary, rather than Joseph, have received this heavenly appearance?" If we compare her position as mother to that of her husband, we would say, "Yes." The message concerns the Child, His future and care. Why does God bypass the mother, who suffered more for the Child than her husband? The message is directly connected to the appearance of the wise men. To whom could God possibly better appear than to Mary, who considered all that occurred there with the Child, in the deepest considerations of her heart? (Luke. 2:19). The message does not so much touch the mutual relationship of the married couple as the relationship of the Child to the world. Now then, who would have reflected about that the most? Would not have Mary? Joseph laboured over the questions of who Mary was for him and who he was to be for Mary. But at the same time, Mary struggled for *the*

*Child*. She considered more the question of who was to be the mother of the Child . . . and her husband, she thought that he would simply remain who he was. For this reason, we would have said, "Since now the way of the *Child* in the world is the subject of the heavenly tidings, the message should go to Mary, and not to Joseph . . . *at least* not to him *alone* . . ."

Yet, the angel passes by Mary and speaks to Joseph. Why? Because the child did not only descend from a woman, but also, and especially, was born *under the law*. Where the law dominates, the *person* steps back and the calling *as office bearer* comes to the foreground. Thus, Mary's person is of less importance than Joseph's office: isn't he the father of the house, the lawful caretaker of the Child, appointed by God? Indeed, he is. And Mary, Joseph, and the Child, must do everything *in subjection to the law*. And you, who read this, must also be subject to that law, for Christ's sake. God's secret counsel does not find those who seek themselves, who only want to hear about their own *favourite subjects*. Only those who spend their hours with God will be in heaven. And, the Marys and the Josephs have to *discipline* their joy by the law, with a practice of discipline that is singular for each person. When God comes to instruct you, tear up the wish list of your own favourite subjects; do it for the sake of your life!

For every privilege is a calling.

And for this reason, all self-willed actions that do not recognize the authority of the calling, are a bereaving of the blessing.

## January 5

### *Dreaming Dreams*

... behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream ...  
— Matt. 2:13.

**Read: Joel 2:28-32**

**Sing: Ps. 110:5, 6**

When Joel prophesied, he predicted this miracle of the coming Messianic age, the “day of the Lord,” on which not only the mighty men, robed and anointed with oil, but also the little and quiet in the land, would dream dreams and see visions. They also would become bearers of God’s most special revelation.

Now when the Child was born in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary *were* of the simple and quiet in the land. And behold — they dreamt their dreams and saw their visions. Also in the realm of revelation, God did send the rich away empty, for He passed by the scribes and filled with revelations the hearts of the poor, whose heads lacked oil. He had also told them, that with the Child, the Messianic age had come to all people. Voices from below had said and sung it also.

Thus prophecy was fulfilled, though only in part. At least, that is what it looked like. For Joel had said that not only to dreamers, but *also to those on guard*, there would be astonishment in the messianic day. God was going to let the world crack, and blood, fire, and pillars of smoke would be His signs. Where now was *this* prophecy? Ah, all that came out of it was this: Joseph, Mary, and the Child had to flee for the murderous desires of a tyrant. They dreamt — the

prophecy was being fulfilled. But the dream also said, “Do not count on a miracle, but flee to Egypt.” How could slaves resist a king? What is a dreamer of God able to do against the whims of a ruler? Thus, prophecy was fulfilled and at the same time not fulfilled.

Then those two had to learn a hard lesson. God was silent and so was the Child. But God cannot lie. Nothing remained except to conclude that there was but one day of the Lord. That one day, however, was divided over several hours. The Messianic “age” spans several “ages.” They dreamt out of God: thus the beginning of the end had come. But the miracle that was going to astonish the world didn’t appear! It was still only the *beginning* of the end. And only faith and patience can wait for the end of this beginning. So they had to believe what otherwise seemed madness: that the dreams of those who were the called of God were the beginning of the tearing down of the world; that the particular action of revelation of God would uproot mountains and disrupt the foundations of the creation for His elect. For between the beginning and the completion of God’s work, and between the morning and evening of the “day of the Lord” lies a time, just long enough, to make the faith of God’s dreamers of dreams perfect, the faith that repeats the text: “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven” (Heb. 12:26), even when nothing else is happening but a quiet dream at night and a secret flight in the sober early morning shimmerings. *Because only faith is sober.*

## January 6

### *No Repressing*

... flee into Egypt ...

— Matt. 2:13.

**Read: Job 19:5-15** [See Preface.]      **Sing: Ps. 103:7**

Flee – into Egypt. What is so difficult about that – that one had to flee, or that one had to flee exactly *to Egypt*? Many say, “There was no better place of refuge than Egypt. Many Jews lived there. Mary and Joseph would be able to speak their own language there, maintain their customs, and find a synagogue to thank God right away that He made the unsuitable escape so suitable. And Herod, whose lips longed for the blood of infants, had nothing to say in Egypt. The distance was not that far. The flight indeed was bitter, but the idea of Egypt was a sweet mixture in the bitter cup of gall.”

Indeed, that is what many people think.

But we will have to reconsider this thought. God does not take back with the one hand, what He gives with the other. Joseph had to flee. That was inconvenient. It was a riddle. But he had to flee to a *suitable country*, the choice of which was no riddle, but very reasonable. And now the burden does not become lighter but heavier. Because two riddles are less of a burden to the soul than one; and three less than two, and four less than three. A whole row of difficult questions will hurt less than one major riddle which can torture one for days. If God had said, “Joseph, you and the Child must *do nothing* against Herod,” then *that* already would have been difficult. For had the

Messianic age not come, and was the Child not the One who moved the world? But if God now also said: “Joseph, you have to remain where you are, and I will beat Herod’s soldiers with blindness, or will freeze their outstretched arm against the Child, or send fire from heaven against those who mock the Child,” then the amazement about the one riddle (the fragility of the child) would have been consumed by the amazement about all those other mysteries. The one miracle would then have repressed the other. Joseph would then have given up about the one riddle and begun with the other, while Mary would not have *kept* anything in her heart, for she would very piously and sweetly have hopped from the one branch to the other.

Egypt was very suitable. And for this reason, it was for people, who have to deal with *God*, terrible and unsuitable. Since God organized the flight so perfectly, all the attention focussed on that one difficulty: Why does He want the flight of His Son, seeing that He is the One who moves the world? God put that one divine mystery in a whole range of practical human, nearly too human, considerations about the shortest way, the most safe asylum, and the greatest ease. Joseph did not get a chance to rid himself of the many problems of that one riddle. And Joseph’s God prohibits also *us to play out the one difficulty against the other*. *Count* your difficulties, count them one by one. But *weigh them first!* For it is easy to multiply the riddles. Yet it is burdensome to appear with *one* question before God without drawing the attention away from it. *Because all repressing damages the soul, and he who looks for problems is usually the most frivolous of people.*

## January 7

### *Fulfillment*

... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet . . . — Matt. 2:15

**Read: Isaiah 24:13-23**

**Sing: Ps. 132:1, 2**

Thus they went into exile, Joseph and Mary, and they did not know what they were up to with God and with the prophets. In their dreaming of dreams, the prophecy was right; yet not in the demonstrations of strength; the world was not lifted from its foundations, although the holy family was. At night, the prophecy seemed to have been fulfilled, but not at day. And who wouldn't rather trust the day than the night?

Yet all of this was arranged in such a way *that prophecy would be fulfilled*. God has said more than that the simple would dream dreams, and that He would move the world by the Child. He also said that He *would call His Son out of Egypt*. Joel spoke of dreams, and Micah said of Bethlehem that it would be the city of the birth. Yet, Hosea had spoken of the son who was called out of Egypt. The dreamers had understood something of Joel's dreams; and of Micah's indications the scribes had understood everything. But God would now Himself explain Hosea's word. No scribe had thought that the Messiah would tread *from* Egypt and for this reason would first have to go *to* Egypt.

But what the scribes could not say to the wise men from the east, God would now show to that worried

couple who were fleeing to Egypt. "Does it worry you, Joseph, that the Child must go to Egypt? Do you think that the flight to Egypt stops the fulfillment of prophecy? No, Joseph, appearances deceive. The Messiah can only reach the cities and villages of Galilee and Judea, and the ways of the world, *via Egypt*. Thus, the journey into Egypt is no intermission in the process of fulfilling the prophetic promise, but the continuation and the fulfillment of it. Egypt is not a dead-end road but the passage way of the Saviour of the world. The flight is necessary not *in spite of* but *because of* the prophecy. Joel was right, but so was Hosea! All God's words are one Word.

The choice which led to Egypt seemed too sober a human choice. Yet, it was in the highest sense Divine. It fulfilled prophecy. Here the human becomes Divine and the ordinary a miracle. The plain fields of human reasoning are cut by the eternal council of God. The flight is a royal procession. And in the same hour when Joseph says, "God's field isn't blooming yet," because the Child must go to Egypt, God's land is flowering in abundance because of the good pleasure of the Lord. Behold, how joyful it continues! See, how "prosperously the King is riding"!

But there is also the difficulty of living in the days of fulfillment, in the days of the ripening. Whoever desires to be with God's simple servant, Joseph, in such critical times must be able to endure that the foolishness of God will prove to be wisdom, that the absence of office (when he escapes) will become by God's providence pure fulfillment of the office (when the prophecy is being fulfilled in his flight). *For the Father is always working and the Child is working too; yet we do not see it.*

## January 8

### *Calling and Calling Again*

... and called My son out of Egypt. — Hosea 11:1.

**Read: Ps. 81:7-17**

**Sing: Ps. 81:4, 5**

Is it true, as it has been said, that “world history is the judgment of the world?” No. It is the *delay* of the judgment of the world. We see in world history not only the postponing of judgment, but also the establishing of mercy. For God, by putting in between the first sin and the last judgment a history of many centuries, opened for Himself the way for the sending of His Son.

Thus history can only be understood as a wrestling match of mercy against judgment. God’s mercy boasts against judgment. And this boast of mercy also explains the history of the church, because judgment begins at the house of God. Therefore judgment calls out against God’s house. The call of judgment purifies God’s sons and cleanses His house. And in such days God’s people must *go to* Egypt to become black from bondage. In that way, people will again learn to cry for freedom, which it gambled away so rashly. But when God’s sons call from the depth again to God, mercy boasts against judgment. And in such days God calls His sons out of Egypt to freedom.

So it went with Israel. This people was God’s firstborn *son*. That son *had* to go to Egypt. For when the patriarchs sold *Joseph* as a slave to Egypt, they sold *themselves* at the same time. Did they not give up the spiritual freedom of Israel’s house for a few

pieces of silver, which they had received from the hands of some heathens? It soon became a *judgment*, that they, who were sons, as beggars had to go to Egypt, because the bread was not in the barns of the free sons but piled up by God in those of a heathen people in bondage. To ask for bread and pay taxes — that is the judgement for those who bargained away the freedom of their own house. Yet, when the sighing seed of patriarchs rises from the brick factories of Egypt to God’s throne, then again mercy *boasts* against judgment. And under the leadership of Moses, God called Israel, that firstborn son, out of Egypt.

God called. *But He had to call again*. When God calls this son out of Egypt today, He must call him again tomorrow. Because in this son lives sin (Hosea 11:2), and sin is — the journey to Egypt. Thus, God must call and call always again. Mercy indeed boasts against the judgment, yet if God does not reach further than *this* son, namely the Israel according to the flesh, then all the boasting of mercy is in vain. He who boasts must *indeed* also triumph. Mercy *must* completely overcome judgment. God once had to call a Son, whom He had to call from Egypt but once. If that great Son had not come, then God’s call had been in vain. For deliverance is not with man. His sin caused the lawsuit between mercy and judgment to be inconclusive. *Not in man will history come to its rest; sin always stops the solution; and the sinner wrestles against his own acquittal.*

## January 9

### *Called for Once and Always*

... Out of Egypt I have called My Son. — Matt. 2:15.

**Read: Hosea 11**

**Sing: Ps. 81:8, 9**

History would not come to its rest in man. That is what we saw yesterday. For as long as sin has its desires, which are contrary to the freedom that is from God, so long the wrestling match of mercy will not gain the victory over judgment.

But what was impossible for the earthly son, God has wrought in the Son who is from heaven. The great Son has come: Jesus Christ is His name. And He is God's only begotten Son in a much higher sense than Israel ever could be called. Also, on this Son came frightening days when Joseph exchanged His gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the journey to Egypt, to live again from Egypt's hand. Then judgment called against the holy family, against the house of God, because the Child came to "bear the wrath of God against sin, during all the time He lived on earth." For this reason the Son went to Egypt. But then the miracle occurred: God's Son was in Egypt, yet in *Him*, different than in His fathers, lived no sin. While sin was the journey to Egypt, there was still no journey to Egypt in Him. When God *sent this Son*, He was willing to go. He has always been willing to go to Egypt. He would go to Egypt up to the end, for it was the time of *fulfillment* of prophecy. Thus, He always *had to be* willing to go to the bondage of Egypt, until He was

crucified in the city which spiritually was called Egypt (Rev. 11:8). *But* — being in Egypt, and eating the bread of Egypt, He nevertheless would not be of Egypt. In Him there was nothing that was Egyptian, because He was the Holy One of God, separated from sinners and having become higher than the heavens.

Soon God would call *this* Son from Egypt. Then God's calling would have reached its rest. Calling *once* was then enough. Christ would never let God call for nothing. In Christ there was no sin. He would never serve any Baals but always be busy in the things of His Father, because He was Israel's true and pure son. Let mercy *now* freely boast against judgment. For mercy was now busy *overthrowing* judgment. *Into eternity*, Egypt would never again enslave the free sons of God. God had called His Son, the only begotten One, from Egypt. What the people of Israel lived through was not only fully completed in Jesus Christ, as the shade into reality, but had also been cleansed from all its *sinful* additives. It was brought to perfection by purification. Israel's history would have been a foolish ring of events without the Christ. But now that Christ fulfilled that history in Himself and for Himself, we see in the zigzag line of Israel, and in the extreme trail of tears of Joseph and Mary, the straight line of God's will, who explained all of history in the Christ and brought it to rest. Christ only is the rest of history. *Because the battle between mercy and judgment was decided by Him.*

## January 10

### *Providence and Prudence*

But when he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.  
— Matt. 2:22.

**Read: Matt. 2:13-23**

**Sing: Ps. 37:2, 3**

God sends His children out on pilgrim's ways, but He does not give them directions or a map of the area. Just look at Joseph, who was directed by a particular *providence* of God, but also by a particular *prudence* of man. There was a particular divine *providence*, which revealed its most peculiar mysteries to Joseph along distinct ways. In the dream, God indicated to him to escape to Egypt. And faster than royal couriers could run, the heavenly messenger came to tell Joseph that Herod was dead. Thus, Joseph heard that he *was allowed* and had to return. This was God's providence!

But in all of this, human *prudence* was not excluded. On the contrary: heaven *correctly* said *as much* as Joseph needed to know. *No more* was reported to him besides this. God's words were distributed sparingly and, as a result, were also very valuable. For this reason, the angel indeed told him that he had to go to the *country* of Israel but did not mention to which *province* in that country. The coachman of God's holy Child had to reflect carefully *himself* which *city* and which *village* had been assigned to him. God indeed told him that the one tyrant was dead, the tyrant who had killed some

children. But that another tyrant had become king, who had not killed some dozens of children, but murdered thousands of adults, pilgrims on the way to the temple, a tyrant whose little finger was thicker than Herod's loins, was not revealed to Joseph by heaven. *People* had to tell him that. And they had to inform him of this not when he was still in Egypt, but when he had already come to the border of the country of Israel. Joseph himself had to think about this, and with the most delicate care, selected the place where the Child, who was the most valuable Pledge, could live. He himself had to determine that Judea, where the new king ruled in his wickedness, was a dangerous place for them. Only when he was satisfied in his mind about what he had to do, his prudence obtained approbation by a heavenly work of providence. For only then God said to him, by a dream of revelation, that he was right, that Galilee and not Judea was the province to live in with the Child.

In such a way, God is always at work. When He gave pillars of fire and clouds to Israel by His particular *providence*, then still the eyes of Hobab, the expert in the desert, had to serve the *prudence* of Israel. Because God's work does not eliminate our work, but puts it into motion. Thus, you should also find the ways of your life in fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you the supreme knowledge of His ways for His good pleasure. 'Lift up your eyes *on high*' for that is where *providence* is. But also direct them down below in extreme *prudence*. *Be then careful as a serpent, for you are nothing without prudence, but be also upright as a dove, for you are nothing without providence.*