Sermon-based Small Groups

_____ of _____

1stPresDowntown

Exile and Return

Matthew 2:13-15; 19-21

Week of October 4, 2026

This week's scripture:

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… 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.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

1. A Story That Looks Like a Detour

The sermon opened by acknowledging that the flight to Egypt looks, on the surface, like a detour—the story stalling before it really begins. Have you ever experienced a season of your life that felt like a detour—something that seemed to interrupt the story you thought you were living? Looking back, do you see it differently now?

The sermon posed a central question early on: why would God choose to save through reliving rather than bypassing? The answer offered was that God takes human experience seriously—that entering the story is itself the point. How does that reframe the way you think about difficulty or delay in your own life? What does it mean that God doesn't bypass the hard parts?

2. The Moses Pattern: Jesus Relives Israel's Story

Matthew's first readers would have immediately heard the echo of Moses in this story—a murderous king, a preserved child, exile, and return. The sermon described this as haggadah:

the retelling of sacred stories in ways that illuminate the present. Are there stories from your own family, community, or faith tradition that you return to again and again as a way of making sense of the present? What makes a story worth retelling?

3. The First Movement: Escape — God Is Aware
The sermon challenged a thin image of God—the cheerleader who says "You've got this!" from a safe distance—and replaced it with a God who knows the danger before it arrives and acts within it. Which image of God do you find yourself defaulting to when things get hard? What would it take to trust the God who is aware rather than the one who cheers from the sideline?

4. The Second Movement: Exile — God Lives Among Us
The sermon named four kinds of exile: the exile of grief, of illness, of estrangement, and of faith. The Spokane exiles story illustrated how exile strips away everything familiar and leaves a person holding only what is essential. Which of these four kinds of exile resonates most with where you are right now—or with someone close to you? What has exile—in any form—stripped away, and what has it revealed?

The sermon described the incarnation as God taking up residence in the exile—not sending a memo, but sending a son. "Whatever Egypt you are living in, God has been there." Does that claim feel like comfort or like a stretch to you right now? What would it mean, practically and personally, to believe that God is not watching your exile from the outside but living it from the inside?

5. The Third Movement: Return — God Sets the Captives Free
The sermon noted that Moses led Israel toward the promised land but could not complete the journey—he died within sight of it. Jesus is the new Moses who completes what Moses could not. The cross is the ultimate exile; the resurrection is the definitive return. How does the resurrection change the way you understand your own exile seasons? Does it make the promise of return feel more real, or is that still a hard thing to trust?

6. Living It Out
The sermon closed with the three-part map of God's saving work: God escapes with us (God is aware), God exiles with us (God is present), God returns to set us free (exile is not permanent). Which of these three movements do you most need to hear right now—and why?