

PULPIT COMPANION

**GOD HAS
SKIN IN THE
GAME**

MATTHEW 2:13-33

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This powerful message takes us beyond the familiar nativity scene into the raw reality of God's entrance into our world.

Drawing from Matthew 2:13-23, we encounter a Christmas narrative that doesn't shy away from danger, violence, and exile. Jesus' first journey wasn't to a throne but to Egypt as a refugee, fleeing state-authorized violence under Herod's brutal regime. This isn't a sanitized story, it's God putting skin in the game, entering history wrapped in vulnerability.

The sermon challenges us to recognize that God didn't wait for ideal conditions to arrive; He came into the world as it truly is, broken, violent, and dangerous. Through Joseph's midnight escape, the weeping of Rachel for slaughtered children, and Jesus' obscure upbringing in Nazareth, we see that faith doesn't mean staying safe in danger zones. Instead, it means listening to God's voice and obeying His direction even when it costs us comfort.

The message confronts our modern tendency to prioritize safety over survival skills, reminding us that God sometimes calls us to leave dangerous situations so we can grow. As we stand at the threshold of a new year, we're invited to put our own skin in the game, to invest ourselves fully in God's redemptive work, trusting that the One who entered our darkness will lead us through it.





SCRIPTURES FROM PULPIT AI

Explicitly Cited Scriptures

1. **Matthew 2:13-23** - Main text (Flight to Egypt, Massacre of Innocents, Return to Nazareth)
2. **Hosea 11:1** - "Out of Egypt I called my son"
3. **Exodus 1:8-11** - New king who did not know Joseph; oppression of Israel
4. **Exodus 1:15-16** - Pharaoh's command to kill Hebrew male children
5. **Jeremiah 31:15** - Rachel weeping for her children
6. **John 10:9-10** - Jesus as the door; thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy
7. **Isaiah 11:1** - Shoot from the stump of Jesse
8. **Colossians 2:9** - Fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ

Alluded to or Thematically Referenced

1. **John 1:14** - "The Word became flesh" (incarnation theme)
2. **Philippians 2:5-8** - Christ's humility and taking on human form
3. **Hebrews 2:14-18** - Jesus sharing in humanity to destroy death
4. **Hebrews 4:15** - Jesus tempted in every way yet without sin
5. **Matthew 1:18-25** - Joseph's obedience to angelic direction
6. **Luke 2:1-7** - Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem
7. **John 1:46** - "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"
8. **Psalms 23:4** - Walking through valley of shadow of death
9. **Romans 8:28** - God working all things together for good
10. **2 Corinthians 12:9** - God's grace sufficient in weakness
11. **Psalms 34:18** - God near to the brokenhearted
12. **Isaiah 53:3-5** - Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief





DEVOTIONAL

Day 1: God Enters the Danger Zone

Reading: Matthew 2:13-15; Exodus 1:8-16

Devotional: God didn't wait for perfect conditions to enter our world. He came into violence, political oppression, and state-authorized terror. Joseph received divine instructions in the darkness to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt, the very place that symbolized oppression for God's people. This teaches us that faith doesn't wait for ideal circumstances. When you find yourself in a dangerous season, listen for God's voice. He may be directing you to safety so you can grow. Obedience in the dark is better than comfort in danger. God sanctifies survival, your midnight will become your morning testimony. Don't mistake staying in harm's way for faith; true faith listens to God's direction and moves toward growth.

Reflection: Where is God calling you to move for your spiritual growth and safety?

Day 2: God Redeems History by Reliving It

Reading: Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15; John 10:9-10

Devotional: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Jesus walked the path Israel failed to complete. Where they rebelled, He obeyed. Where they broke covenant, He fulfilled it. God's redemptive plan doesn't erase your history, He redeems it by entering it. Your past wounds don't have to define your future. Stop pretending the past has no power and start trusting the God who has power over what holds you. Bring your whole story to God, not just the sanitized version. He wants to heal your history, not hide it. Choose obedience where your bloodline chose mere survival. Refuse to let inherited trauma become inherited destiny. God has more power over your past than your past has over you.

Reflection: What part of your story needs God's redemptive touch today?





DEVOTIONAL

Day 3: God Stands Where Grief Screams

Reading: Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16-18

Devotional: Rachel weeps for her children, and God doesn't silence her. The massacre of the innocents reveals a sobering truth: Jesus lived while others died. This is the weight of incarnation, God doesn't look away from grief. Your trauma travels with you across generations, zip codes, and achievements. From the Silent Generation to Gen Z, each carries unprocessed pain, postponed healing, and inherited grief. But here's the truth: grief doesn't have an expiration date. God validates your tears before telling you to be strong. You don't have to rush through your pain or pretend success cancels sorrow. Lamenting isn't weakness, it's unfinished business. Your travel travels with you, but God travels with you too.

Reflection: What grief have you been carrying alone that God wants to hold with you?

Day 4: God Chooses the Long Road of Obscurity

Reading: Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 2:23

Devotional: Nazareth, a nowhere town with no temple, no throne, no reputation. Yet God chose this obscure place to raise His Son. Why? Because roots don't grow in the spotlight; they grow in dark soil beneath the surface. Before Jesus had public authority, He learned private submission. Before His hands healed multitudes, they worked with wood in silence. God's workshop is often a small, secret place where He sharpens His servants. If you feel unseen, uncelebrated, or overlooked, you're not delayed, you're in development. God doesn't need recognition to produce redemption or platforms to prepare saviors. What's formed in secret places withstands pressure in public places. Trust the Nazareth season.

Reflection: What is God developing in you during this season of obscurity?





DEVOTIONAL

Day 5: Put Skin in the Game

Reading: Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:5-8

Devotional: God didn't use a body, He dwelt in one. The fullness of deity took on flesh, experienced real danger, shed real blood, and won real victory. This is why your body matters, your pain matters, and your life matters. God's strategy of salvation required Him to put skin in the game, and now He calls you to do the same. Faith with no cost has no credibility. The world doesn't need loud assertions; it needs believers who invest themselves fully. This year, put skin in the game. Get out of toxic situations so you can grow. Trust God through your losses. Become the change-maker in your family. Move forward with faith, knowing God showed you how by entering your world, your pain, and your story.

Reflection: Where will you put skin in the game this year? What will you invest in God's kingdom?

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank You for putting skin in the game for me. Help me to trust You in danger zones, bring my whole story to You for redemption, honor my grief without being trapped by it, grow deep roots in obscurity, and invest myself fully in Your purposes. Walk with me through this year. In Jesus' name, Amen.





SMALL GROUP GUIDE: "God Has Skin in the Game"

Sermon Series: Christmas 2025

Theme: God's Incarnation and Personal Investment in Our Lives

Opening Prayer:

Begin your group time by inviting God's presence and asking Him to speak to each person as you discuss how He has "skin in the game" in our lives.

Key Scripture:

Matthew 2:13-23

Icebreaker Question

Question: Share a time when someone showed up for you in a difficult moment, not just with words, but with their presence and personal investment. How did that impact you?

Sermon Recap

The sermon explored how God didn't wait for perfect conditions to enter our world. Instead, Jesus was born into danger, marked for death by the state, and forced to flee as a refugee. God demonstrated ultimate commitment by entering the "danger zone" of our broken world, showing us that He has real "skin in the game."





SMALL GROUP GUIDE: "God Has Skin in the Game"

Key Takeaways

1. God Entered the Danger Zone

- Jesus' first journey was to exile, not celebration
- God doesn't wait for safety to bring salvation
- Faith doesn't mean staying in dangerous situations; it means listening to God's direction to move where you can grow

2. God Redeemed History by Reliving It

- Jesus walked through what Israel failed to complete
- God revisits what wounded us so it no longer defines us
- Your history is not a prison, it's a place God wants to heal

3. God Stood Where Grief Screamed

- Trauma travels with you across generations
- From the Greatest Generation to Gen Z, each carries unprocessed pain
- God validates our tears before telling us to be strong

4. God Chose the Long Road of Obscurity

- Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a place of no reputation
- God grows depth in small, hidden places where applause cannot reach
- Roots grow deep in the dark before they rise to the surface

5. God's Flesh Became the Strategy of Salvation

- God didn't just use a body; He dwelt in one
- Your life matters, your pain matters, and your body matters
- We must "put skin in the game" by personally investing in God's work





SMALL GROUP GUIDE: "God Has Skin in the Game"

Discussion Questions:

Understanding the Text (15 minutes)

1. **Read Matthew 2:13-23 together.** What strikes you most about this passage that you may have missed in traditional Christmas narratives?
2. The sermon emphasized that "God entered the world as it is." What does this tell us about God's character and His approach to our brokenness?
3. Joseph had to obey God's direction to flee in the night. How does this challenge our understanding of what faith looks like in dangerous situations?

Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

1. **The Danger Zone:** Are you currently in a "danger zone" that God might be calling you to leave? What makes it difficult to obey when God says "get out"?
2. **Trauma That Travels:** The sermon walked through how different generations carry unprocessed pain. Which generation do you identify with, and what "travel" (trauma) have you been carrying? How has it affected your faith journey?
3. **The Nazareth Season:** Have you experienced a season of obscurity where God was developing you in hidden places? How did that season shape who you are today?
4. The pastor said, "We've done our children a disfavor by emphasizing safe and comfort while living in the danger zone." How can we better prepare ourselves and the next generation to navigate real dangers with faith?

Application and Action (20 minutes)

1. **Putting Skin in the Game:** What does it practically mean for you to "put skin in the game" in 2025? Where is God asking you to personally invest rather than just observe?
2. The sermon emphasized that "your history is not a prison, it's a place God wants to heal." What part of your history do you need to bring to God for healing rather than letting it define you?
3. **Breaking Generational Cycles:** The pastor said, "I refuse to let inherited trauma become inherited destiny." What pattern or trauma in your family line do you need to break through obedience to God?
4. How can we, as a small group, support each other in "putting skin in the game" this coming year?





SMALL GROUP GUIDE: "God Has Skin in the Game"

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

Option 1: Get Honest About Your History

- Spend time journaling your "whole story"—the parts you usually hide
- Bring it to God in prayer, asking Him to heal rather than hide it

Option 2: Listen for God's Direction

- If you're in a "danger zone," commit to listening for God's voice about where He wants to move you
- Share your situation with a trusted friend or this group for accountability

Option 3: Identify Your "Travel"

- Write down what trauma has been "traveling" with you
- Ask God to show you one step toward healing this year

Option 4: Invest in Obscurity

- Identify one area where God is calling you to grow in the "small place" where no one is watching
- Commit to depth over visibility for the next season

Group Prayer Focus (10 minutes)

Break into pairs or groups of three and pray for:

1. **Those in danger zones** – for wisdom to hear God's voice and courage to obey
2. **Healing from trauma** – for God to redeem history and break generational cycles
3. **Seasons of obscurity** – for deep roots to grow where God is developing people
4. **Putting skin in the game** – for personal investment and commitment in 2025





SMALL GROUP GUIDE: "God Has Skin in the Game"

Looking Ahead

Next Week's Theme: Forward Faith

Prepare your heart to discuss how to move forward with faith in the coming year, building on the foundation that God has already "put skin in the game" for us.

Closing Thought

"The manger proves it. Egypt confirms it. Nazareth shapes it. The cross seals it. The resurrection declares it. Put skin in the game."

What will it look like for you to put skin in the game this year? Share one commitment with the group before you leave.

Additional Resources

- **For Further Study:** Read the entire Christmas narrative in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2, paying attention to the danger, displacement, and divine direction
- **Reflection Question for the Week:** "What am I allowing to 'travel' with me that God wants to heal?"
- **Memory Verse:** "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." - Colossians 2:9

Remember: God doesn't need recognition to produce redemption. He grows in obscurity what often lasts the longest. Trust Him in your small place.

