

## ĪSHŌ'DĀD OF MARW AD MATT 3:1<sup>1</sup>

‘And during those days came John the Baptist ...’ (Matt 3:1). [From whence did he come and how was he removed?]. . . . Mar Ephrem and others say that Elizabeth removed him from the presence of the sword of Herod. She had received in a revelation that she should cause him to flee to the wilderness .... According to others, an angel snatched him from the arms of his mother, and neither she nor his father nor anyone else knew the place where he was staying. Some others maintain that our Lord and His messenger simultaneously fled from the sword of Herod, one of whom (went) to Egypt, but the other to the wilderness; one of whom rode on an ass, but the other on a strong gust of wind, just like Habakkuk.<sup>2</sup> The Expositor (i.e., Theodore of Mopsuestia) says that he was taken away after coming into possession of the (prophetic?) word. Yet according to others, when Zechariah his father perceived that the child was being sought by the sword of Herod because he was from the territory of Bethlehem – although he himself made his dwelling in Jerusalem because of the high priesthood – he took the child and placed him on the altar of expiation, the place where he had received (news about) his conception from the angel. While he was bowing in prayer about this, the angel snatched him and removed him to a remote part of the wilderness.

After this the Jews asked Zechariah about his son, saying, ‘Where is the prophet who was born in order to deliver Israel from the subjugation of the Romans?’ When he truthfully replied, ‘I do not know,’ they responded to him cruelly: ‘It is because you are jealous about the deliverance of the people. You have killed your son so that we may not be freed from servitude!’ They had supposed he was the Christ on account of the marvels that took place with regard to his conception and his birth. Now when Zechariah saw that they would not listen to argument, nor grant credence to oaths, and that their frenzy was becoming increasingly violent, he ran to take refuge at the altar, following the custom of the Law, but they overtook him between the railings and the altar,<sup>3</sup> and there they murdered him.

Now that blood remained (there) calling out and bubbling for fifty-eight years until (the time of) Titus the son of Vespasian Caesar. When they rebelled against Caesar, this one came with a mighty army and subdued the city. He entered the Temple and saw the blood which was bubbling and heard the sound, and when he asked and learned about this (crime), he killed all the priests upon that very spot, and then the blood became calm.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Syriac text published by Margaret Dunlop Gibson, ed., *The Commentaries of Isho 'dad of Merv, Bishop of Ḥadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English, Volume II: Matthew and Mark in Syriac* (Horae Semiticae 6; Cambridge: University Press, 1911), 37.12-39.15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bel (LXX Daniel 14) 33-39, especially v. 36 in the version of Theodotion.

<sup>3</sup> ܘܥܠ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ. See the parallel accounts in *Prot. Jas.* 22-24 and the *Vitae Prophetarum*.