

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, in mercy you sent your one and only Son to take upon himself our human nature. By his gracious coming deliver us from the corruption of our sin and transform us into the likeness of his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Alleluia. (Colossians 3:15a cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Childermas, that's what it used to be called. The "Slaughter of the Innocents" that's usually the name it goes by today. Martin Luther was apparently of the opinion that God's people should never allow this lesson to disappear from the readings of the Church. But it's jarring and nightmarish. It makes our hearts ache as we behold the full extent of this world's wickedness.

We have just finished looking at the birth of Jesus. Angels singing in fields and shepherds rushing to Bethlehem to see Him. What an honor for this little town so still and silent. The nostalgia builds the warm fuzzies are all present. The little baby Jesus, Immanuel, born to bring peace. It almost makes us forget how it will come.

But within the span of two years, the Wisemen arrive and bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and something else follows them. The jealousy of a truly wicked and warped man who has built his reign in Judea on violence and bloodshed. So Silent nights give way to the sounds of soldiers and the splintering of doorframes. The wailing of mothers as baby boys are ripped from their arms and slaughtered before their very eyes. It's hard and unpleasant to contemplate.

The lesson jars us back into the reality of why the child came. Why the angel again appeared to Joseph in the dream and told him to fly that's the literal translation here "*Get up! Take the Child and His mother and fly to Egypt.*" This child has come to defeat sin, to conquer Satan, to overcome the world and death which has roamed freely about ever since Adam and Eve first partook of the fruit in Eden's Garden. But these foes don't like it.

Revelation pictures the events this way, *A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.* ² *She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.* ³ *Then another sign appeared in heaven: an*

enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴ His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. It's a slightly different telling of the Christmas account, is it not?

Of course, we had heard this was the case already in our Christmas Day Gospel. Twice John tells us, “*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:5)*” and again, “*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:10-11)*” No, I suppose it is not tensile and trees, Christmas lights and hot chocolate but if we are honest with ourselves, it does sound a lot more like the real world.

You see here on this sphere of ours as we hurtle through time and space, things aren't usually so very quiet and serene. Oh, we can kid ourselves into thinking they are. We can turn off the news because we don't like to see the missile strikes and genocides occurring around the globe. We can blame all of the world's problems on failed ideologies and political parties. We can even seek to irradicate sin by imagining that it's all really not hurting us, just a construct of a bygone era that our ever-so-enlightened minds no longer need to contemplate. We can turn a blind eye to the truth and decide not to be inconvenienced by the Word of God which always calls a thing what it really is.

That's what Herod did. How the soldiers that served him slept at night. They convinced themselves that it really wasn't that bad. Maybe even good for the betterment of the nation. “We can't have two kings running around and vying for the throne. Imagine the chaos. Best to put an end to it now before it becomes a bigger problem.” Here we come face to face with the reality of sin. Here we cannot hide it any longer. When left unchecked, well, the sobbing says it all, doesn't it? And Herod's supposed fix, it didn't even accomplish anything other than heartache and pain. The child escaped. The truth will always win out. In fact, Herod's murderous madness, it only fulfilled more of the many prophesies God had made about this Child, His Child.

And there is the bright spot in an otherwise bleak lesson of Scripture. Though we may not always understand the events of the world around us. Though we might like to see them happen in a different way or not at all, God is always in control. These young boys no doubt had been grafted into the vine of the people of Israel, circumcised on the 8th day in keeping with the laws of their faith, made children of God in the action. And though they died this night in the protecting of the promised Messiah, the Messiah had come for them.

You see Matthew will continue to tell us about how Jesus fulfills the Scriptures. He will follow Him from infancy to adulthood. Sin and Satan will continue to rage against Him and those who follow Him. We will come again to another night, the silence of which will be broken by the boots of soldiers and commotion of sin. This time, no flight. Instead, Jesus will face their scorn head-on. Abused and mistreated, He will be dragged before sham courts and fleeting earthly powers and in the end, God's Son will be murdered for the salvation of all. His death, the very tool that defeats the sin that rages in this world of ours. His resurrection the proof that even death cannot claim us. The children of Bethlehem, through faith, stand among the martyrs in heaven, holy, glorified, and praising God as do all believers who went before and follow after. That is what this Child had come to do. Had come to freely give.

Brothers and sisters, Satan still *roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). The world in which we live is filled with sin and death. Though we would like to believe that we can change the channel or explain it away, the reality is that we cannot and sin always ends up leaving us with heartache as we face the consequences. This is all part and parcel of living in a sin-stained, and sin-torn world. And though we like to think it, we are not so very innocent. Childermas, the Slaughter of the Innocents, it's a jarring lesson. But it also reminds us of a God who is altogether different from the world in which we live. He does not come in power or might but comes to save. And because God sent His one and only Son, all of His believing children are safe even in the face of death. So there is **Hope in the Midst of Heartache.**