

Text: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

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:

I've always thought this particular lesson was a little odd in context. We just get done with one of the high festivals of the church year, arguably one of the two our world still bothers to commemorate with us. Church was packed on Christmas Eve. Things, at least for a brief moment in time, looked good. Then we show up to church the very next Sunday and Jesus, well at least Mary and Joseph, are running for their lives, fleeing to Egypt with Jesus because Herod wants Him dead. Odd, no? It's not exactly what we would expect to see after God makes His appearance in the flesh but then it has been odd all the way along. Not just from Gabriel's chat with Mary but from Adam and Eve's chat with Satan. Now so often the way of God seems different than the way of the world, strangely different and our lesson today offers us the views from both sides in striking opposition to each other. So, lets peer into the odd, even gruesome little history of Jesus' earthly family's flight into Egypt focused on **A TALE OF TWO KINGS: ONE WILLING TO DO ANYTHING TO HOLD POWER. ONE WILLING TO HUMBLE HIMSELF FOR YOU.**

I suppose in this way our lessons hook up. On Christmas Day, John had told us that the darkness of sin, our world, Satan himself had misunderstood, failed to understand the arrival of the Word made Flesh (John 1:5,14). Herod is a prime example of that.

The Magi come looking for the one born King of the Jews. They have seen the star in the east and made quick work of the prophecies which announced His birth. They go to the place of kings, the palace in Israel. But instead of rejoicing with these foreigners who had come announcing the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Herod is disturbed (Matthew 2:1-12). The “why” is somewhat obvious. If this child is to be King, then Herod’s reign is done. His power is gone. The plotting begins almost as quickly as the lies but God intervenes. Angels warn the wisemen who head home another way. But Jesus is not yet safe. Joseph requires another angelic dream sending the family into hiding fulfilling yet another portion of Scripture in our lesson today.

It’s sad isn’t it. The first King that we contemplate is drunk with power and will do anything to keep it. In the portion which is omitted from our lesson one, of the great tragedies of God’s Word follows on the heels of the greatest promise fulfilled. Herod sends the soldiers to Bethlehem and all the baby boys two years old and younger are murdered. A slaughter that would no doubt haunt the dreams of the soldiers who followed the order. Jeremiah had lamented, “*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.* (Matthew 2:18 & Jeremiah 31:15)”

It’s sad really the importance this world gives to worldly power, prestige or popularity. Weapons that can destroy more than a little place like Bethlehem promising to ensure our safety at the expense of the blood of others. The threat is enough at least until someone else designs something more powerful and bloody. Science tells us we can do whatever we want and can behave like the animals which we are supposed to be superior too, but at what cost? Our weak philosophy tells us it’s okay because it’s my body and therefore my choice. Far before the gunfire in our schools is the battle fought without bullets or blood as words rip apart classmates because they aren’t as cool, as good at sports, or whatever other ridiculousness we concoct that says I’m better than another. Oh, and adults aren’t much better. “No”, is far fouler these days than a four-letter word at least when it’s spoken to us instead of by us as our world and us sometimes with it plunges into the abyss of selfishness in our post-modern pragmatism that proudly pretends that they only truth that exists is the one that works for me. Sin, Satan, the world follow the way of the first King, and far too often, so do we.

Ah, but in this lesson there is the different way, though odd and unassuming. It’s why God doesn’t flatten Herod for his horrendous behavior. It’s why Mary and Joseph are on the run with the little baby both infant and infinite.

You see God isn’t concerned with power. It all belongs to Him, even if the world fails to see it or understand it. All glory, power, dominion, not even Satan can wrestle it away, though he irrationally will try to take it at every turn. Instead, God has something else on His mind. In His great love for us, He is willing to do the unthinkable. How did say it though Isaiah, “*Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me*”; and so he became their Savior. *In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.* (Isaiah 63:8-9)” Or again as Paul told the Galatians, “*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* (Galatians 4:4-5)”

Dear friends do you see it here? This isn't just a better way. It's not simply an encouragement for us to give up our petty earthbound power struggles in some ill-fated attempt to be like Jesus or earn our salvation. This is God going to work for you. This is what God endures for us. He sets aside the full use of all that is rightfully His. He allows Himself to look weak, even to be run out of the town of His birth by a pretender to the throne so that He can endure far worse for you. Paul will announce it so wonderfully to the Philippians, "*(Jesus) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!* (Philippians 2:6-8)"

It's a different kind of King, a different kind of war, with far better results for His subjects. As we rejoice in His birth, we have opportunity again to watch as he does it all for us, perfectly for us. He will endure the blood, the persecution and become the sacrifice for all the times I have been more understanding of the ways of the world the ways of God. He'll win the victory in the most unlikely of ways. Through death and resurrection, we are made children of God. It's not exactly what I would expect, but it's exactly what I need ... **THE KING WHO IS WILLING TO HUMBLE HIMSELF FOR ME ... FOR YOU! Amen!**