

<sup>13</sup> After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him.” <sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. <sup>15</sup> He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**<sup>[a]</sup>

#### The Massacre of the Innocents

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

**<sup>18</sup> A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping,<sup>[b]</sup> and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
and she refused to be consoled,  
because they are no more.<sup>[c]</sup>**

#### The Return to Nazareth

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead.” <sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

### The Great Let Down

The Sunday after Christmas are quiet. If you’re anything like me you’re trying to get back into a routine, find some stability, because for most of us, the hectic holidays are over, Christmas is done, decorations are coming down, presents are unwrapped. It’s the after Christmas Let-down. But we’re not quite through Christmas yet. New Years is just one more hurdle before the struggle to survive continues. And sometimes life is just that, a struggle. You pray and hope that life will get better (we’re looking forward to a better year, we’re hopeful) but instead we’re met with reality more and or newer challenges. You look to God for hope and healing but instead he says, “No,” or “Not yet.” Sometimes you feel let down.

The Christmas season deals with just that, being let down. It’s full of death and those who faced hardships. After Christmas we remember the martyrs and those who have been killed for the faith. Just yesterday we remembered the slaughter of the innocents, when Herod gave the order to kill every child under two. Imagine how let down Joseph must have felt after Christmas. He’s cared for the Christ-child. He’s cared for his family and now that Christmas is finally over he’s hoping things settle down for a little while, go back to the quiet days. Maybe he’s already moved back to Nazareth, set up shop, and then the Magi visit his house. Just when life seemed to be returning to normal, an angel warns him in the middle of a dream, “*Flee to Egypt.*” I imagine Joseph thought that if Jesus is God’s son, life might be a little easier but here he is fleeing in the middle of the night, wondering how many other families have to do this?

Our situation may not seem so extreme here, but then again ISIS beheaded 10 Christians on Christmas because of their faith, but our lesson reminds us that no matter the plans of wicked kings, cowards, or tyrants or the destruction and death they bring, they can only serve God's purpose.

But that first Christmas was done and over. It may have been a couple of Christmases since the birth in Bethlehem. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are living in a house. They're stable, not in a stable. We don't know how long it was before the Magi arrived but if Herod is trying to cast a large net he aims for all those boys under two years old. Why? Because he is a power hungry tyrant, a coward who killed any threat to his throne. He claimed to be king but his actions cause us to question that claim.

Herod the great may have kept the peace and prospered his nation, but he was delusional. He clawed his way to the top and killed many people on the way. In an effort to maintain control over his life he killed his Father in law, several of his wives (even his favorite wife), and two of his sons. His brother escaped death by dying. He brutally removed any who stood in his way. Human life meant nothing for him, so much so that Augustus said, "It's safer to be Herod's sow than son." And I'm fairly certain Herod ate pork. Herod is remembered as the butcher of Bethlehem, who slowly died in agony, tormented and delirious.

Just think about how Joseph must have felt. He did the right thing. He cared for Mary as his own wife. But now he's fleeing with his family, struggling to maintain some sense of control or security over his situation, and he can't even keep them safe. He couldn't provide a house for his pregnant wife when he arrived in Bethlehem, and now just as he's getting set up, they have to leave again. It seems as if nothing is under his control.

Not even a week has gone by since our celebration on Christmas and Christmas Eve, and yet we're not out of the woodwork yet. New Year's Eve stands between us and a normal week. We'll be getting back to normal soon, the kids will return to school, the house will be back to normal or at least something a little more stable. That's not how life works. If the first Christmas was troubled by death at the hands of evil men, what makes us think our Christmas will be any better?

But we want better, we want more, we want to protect what's ours and like little Herods we'll struggle with all our might to maintain what we have and prove we are in control. What Herod struggled with is common to us all, it's the original sin, a desire to be like God. So when our Kingdom comes under attack or someone threatens our status, we'll rant and rage against the heavens and even God himself. God then serves as a soft target, sometimes a punching bag, someone to blame for all the senseless suffering in this world. That suffering wasn't caused by God. It was brought on by us. All sinners are delusional – especially if we think we can contend with God and win. Fight against him.

So strive as we might to be in control God proves how out of control we really are, sometimes we are let down slowly, other times it's more like Herod. It's not limited to children. It's not unique to Bethlehem. It's not the only thing we find this side of Christmas. In tragedy of life in a sinful and sometimes violent world God's plan of salvation cannot be stopped.

No matter how hard Herod tried, he could not kill the Christ. His plans, carefully crafted as they were, came to nothing. God sent messengers to Joseph to protect him. He sent him to Egypt. It's the Exodus all over again. 1500 years ago in Egypt another tyrannical king ordered all baby boys born to be thrown into the river. God used him as another pawn in his plan. Moses was spared and now another prophet like Moses is raised up. Jesus is Israel reduced down to one, Israel done right. God called his Son out of Egypt in order to lead the nations to the Promised Land. God can deal with the Herods. God can and does provide and protect Joseph, Mary, and the Christ-child.

It wasn't easy. Joseph didn't move to a secure suburb with a gated community. But he made his home with those driven from home by terror. Jesus needed parents to feed and clothe him, protect him from Herod, carry him to Egypt and bring him back. Jesus is raised a poor carpenter in Nazareth and became known as a Nazarene though he was born in Bethlehem. Nothing seems significant about this King, so far he's said nothing, done nothing, he's vulnerable, and yet without making any claims, he is proclaimed king. Years later he took up his throne. Finally, when they think they've won when he's crucified, dead, and buried – he comes back. God's power is made perfect, glorified in weakness, the weakness of a child, a cross, and yet this leads to eternal life.

But until then there will be weeping as Rachel fills in for the Mothers in Bethlehem. <sup>18</sup> *A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping,<sup>17</sup> and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.* Rachel will be comforted.

God deals with them in two ways, for the unrepentant God breaks and defeats every evil plan according to his purpose or he puts them to death and raises them again with Jesus. That's what God has done with you. No matter how hard the devil, the world, or even our sinful nature try, God won't let them win. He breaks and defeats every evil purpose. He puts to death our sinful nature. In baptism he drowns our little Herod like he did Pharaoh in the Red sea. He raised you in the forgiveness of sins to life in Baptism. He pours into your heart the light of Christ. His word which not only creates faith but also feeds our faith and keeps us in the faith. He equips us for eternal life with his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

We may want a kingly character with everything under his control instead we have our God who looks weak and powerless but controls kings and nations to accomplish his will. God also uses the weak, the powerless, those who can claim nothing for themselves to accomplish his will. God responded to Paul's thorn with, "*My power is made perfect in weakness.*" God is most glorified when he does all the work, and we receive the glory when we say we are helping. God uses corrupt characters to accomplish his will (Herod claimed to be King, but the birth of a child troubled him. Herod tried to deceive the Magi but in the end was deceived by them. Herod then turned vengeful and tried to kill the child but ended up dead. Herod plots and acts in vain. He's a failure multiple times over, a coward who is afraid of a child and then can't even kill him. He has no control. Like a dog on a chain, he's limited). God makes wicked rulers serve divine purposes, whether they are willing or not.

Instead of looking like the victor who manhandles the Herods of this world – we have a God who defeats them by falling into their hands and being crucified. The world will be a struggle. Life won't always work out as we've carefully planned. Find comfort in his coming. He suffered in every way we have, and yet remains without sin. Though the effects of sin and death remain today – our salvation is unstoppable. God guarantees it. That doesn't mean the pain won't subside, life will get easier, but it does mean we have a God who is with us through them all. He came down, delivered his people from Egypt through Moses, his son from death through the resurrection, and you through his Word.

So why does sin still exist? Why all of the evil in this world? Maybe it's because God wants us to see that really is a problem. He wants us looking forward to home. He wants us rejoicing in what he has done. Our king comes and he does everything to demonstrate to a world wracked by sin that you are not beyond redemption or hope.

Unlike the nativity scenes which end safely with the Magi, the scene continues with a massacre, showing the human cost of Christ's birth. Herod rages on. God did not stop the hand of Herod from harming the little ones. The church from early on has considered them the first martyrs. They gave their life, so that Jesus could live. And Jesus gave his life so they could live eternally. This Sunday may be quiet but it's not a let down. It's a reminder that God's Will is always accomplished.