**Matthew 2:13-23 (ESV)**

**13** Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” **16** Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17**  Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: **18**  “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.” **19** But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **20** saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” **21** And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. **23** And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

**“The Christmas Spirit”**

 Blessed Christmas season to all in the Name of Him who comes to save us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Family, food, and fun might only last for a day, but the joy of God becoming man is what the Church continues to celebrate. It is during this season of Christmas that two startling festivals stick out. One is the festival of St. Stephen who was the first Christian martyr after Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The second is the festival of The Holy Innocents, or the children of Bethlehem, who were the first martyrs after Christ was born into the world. This is the text we hear today recorded by St. Matthew. Both these festivals deal with death not from a standpoint of sickness or accident, but by the hatred of sinners over Christ. Yet, what quickly dampens the Christmas Spirit still has joy for God proves faithful to save.

 Here is the joy to the world that we need in our present age of darkness. Certainly, something always seems to happen at Christmas and it did again this year in Baghdad killing 37 or so Christians at worship.[[1]](#endnote-1) At the same time, the FBI just recently released data showing the murder rate in America. You could combine all the other weapons and guns still ranked the highest. Plenty can debate firearm laws, but violence comes from within man. Jesus said, “… everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment…” Matthew 5:22. Such violent darkness was evident in Bethlehem not from a civilian, but regrettably by Herod a civil servant. His murderous spirit stood against Christ with a heavy hand. The hatred that stood in the way actually paved the way for God. St. John teaches us, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” John 1:5. God calls us to trust in Jesus no matter how dark the road.

 This road lead Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for a time because of registration demanded by Caesar Augustus. After Christ’s birth, time passed and the family figured the city of king David was fitting to raise the King of kings. Of course, the appearance of the wise men adoring gifts one day lead to a fleeing procession for him the next. There was plenty of reason to be afraid since the angel warned Joseph about Herod. This ruler liked to win the people, but behind the scenes, Herod cut down any competition, even his own family. A child in Bethlehem born to be “King of the Jews” was just another causality in his crosshairs. Fleeing to Egypt was not likely the first choice by Jewish parents. Leaving the land of promise for a former land of slavery is not where you want to settle down. However, the protective care of God was at work. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

 Jesus is set apart from the darkness of any Herod. What seems like evil men stepping on the plans of God is God having His way with men. Going to Egypt marks Christ to be a deliverer just like Moses against Pharaoh. Of course, the problem was no longer in Egypt but in Israel for Mary and Joseph. Just as the problem is no longer in Israel, but with a sinful world enslaved to the Devil. He is the darkness that looks to overpower Christ and His family the Church. Flattery of sinners is the tool of choice for this slave master, but blaspheme of God’s Name and suppressing the saints always seems to impress. Yet, the Christmas Spirit is that Christ is Lord. The sinless Son of God stepped into our world born of the Virgin. As Isaiah declared, “So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.” Darkness has always been a problem but Christ uniquely leads His baptized. His way does not go by our plans and we are better off because He rules by a promise for all to believe.

 The road to Bethlehem carried only the stench of death. What Herod brought in his fury lashed out against the many to get at the one. He was not fighting a just war, but using whatever means necessary to get what he wanted. Such agony and grief from injustice was before in Israel when God exiled His people to Babylon. The loss of the male boys two years and younger was a tragedy. It was on par with Pharaoh drowning the children in Egypt. Yet, Moses escaped tragedy only to later save God’s people. How much more does Christ in His holiness bring salvation as God for all! He escapes the hands of Herod only to seek later suffering and death on the cross! Jesus was a sacrifice for all sinners be they evil as Herod or helpless as two-year olds. One did end up being the sacrifice for the many. His grief carries all sorrows. This is what HE says, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

 Jesus saves from the darkness none knows how to deal with in this world. Trying to answer why God allows atrocities like Herod in Bethlehem, a bombing on Christmas day, sorrow over abortion, or any other injustice leaves painful questions. It might even turn us away from how God works the greatest by the gift of His Son. He answers the cries in the darkness. If the strength of men were enough to silence the darkness then why did God cry out from His cross? Only One death shines to justify the unjustifiable way of sinners who stand condemned by the Law. Luther did not see the children in Bethlehem robbed of life. He wrote, “So the Lord took them away at the time of his own advent in this world, as a sweet smelling sacrifice to himself. Thus much good would yet come from Herod’s murdering.”[[2]](#endnote-2) The innocent life of Christ is the offering of love for all time. Justice sought after in life must face how God came in the flesh. His life already promises that He works in a dark world. It still happens by His Word and Sacrament saving lives by faith in Him.

 The road from Egypt lead back not to the city of a king or Jerusalem, but Galilee. Fear from Joseph once again served God’s plan. Only an angel could give directions to go to a place like Nazareth. It fulfilled what scripture said, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Of course, what God finds fulfilling from His Word is far from what men desire. The Messiah and His family ended up settling down in a second rate town. Let alone, it was a despised place and anyone coming from there would be despised. “Nazareth” comes from Hebrew origin meaning a branch or offshoot. How fitting for the savior of sinners to appear insignificant. Isaiah spoke of the Savior this way saying, “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” 53:2. The Son of God stepped deeper into the darkness at Nazareth. This humiliating title even accompanied the king all the way to His cross.

 Jesus frees from the darkness to see His light. God used Moses to set His people free from Pharaoh. The Son sent by the Father freely defeats sin, death, and the devil for all. Deliverance was not by parting water, but Jesus placing Himself into the darkness. He saw no light but prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus seeks to free us from all that we fear. The light of His forgiving Word speaks to the darkness of sin. The promise of life by baptism into His Name has dealt with the darkness of death. The sacrament is Him offering victory against dark days of the Devil. Like Mary and Joseph, Jesus of Nazareth is with His Church. All things must work out for good because this king is humbly with us. God calls us to trust in Jesus no matter how dark the road. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\_east/officials-car-bomb-kills-15-near-baghdad-church/2013/12/25/560764d2-6d4b-11e3-a5d0-6f31cd74f760\_story.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Postils Vol. 7 260 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)