



“Pain FULL”

First Sunday Of Christmas

Saturday & Sunday, December 28 & 29, 2019

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Just a few days ago, we celebrated Christmas Eve, and we heard Luke's narrative concerning the birth of Jesus. We started with that historical setup:

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Then we got the rundown on Joseph's lineage:

because (Joseph) was descended from the house and family of David. (Verse 4)

followed by the events leading up to the actual birth: lying in a manger, shepherds visiting, and angels singing.

Then, *today*, we heard about how, after the magi finished their visit, they are warned in a dream to *not* return to King Herod, but rather to head back east via a different route. Joseph is warned, also in a dream, to hightail it out of town, all the way west to Egypt. Upon hearing that the magi have avoided him, Herod does this very politically savvy move, and he orders all children in and around Bethlehem age two and younger to be executed.

Wait...*what?*

I think that's more like, Herod goes into psychotic, political dystopian, mode and **butchers** innocent toddlers, because he's an egotistical, paranoid, despot, rear half of a donkey.

And **all this** comes *immediately* after we've just had all the big, warm fuzzies, of December 25th. This butchery and bloodshed in Bethlehem follows *Silent Night; What Child is This?*; and *Angels We Have Heard On High*. We are **Way** within our bounds of normality to ask: **WHAT** is this tale of death, destruction, and massacre *doing* in *scripture*, let alone this close to the celebration of the birth of Jesus?

I don't mean to be simplistic. I don't want to sound like I'm trying to trivialize this story, or any images or memories that hearing this passage might bring to mind. Part of the reason this story is in scripture is to help us understand that, we live in an imperfect world. We live in a world where babies die; where people are murdered; where honest people lose their homes while those who are far from honest thrive. We live in a world where people get sick, sometimes terminally. We live in a world where neighbors will attack neighbors over real – or perceived – slights. Or because their skin is a different color. Or because they speak our language with an accent that betrays the fact they learned another language first.

We live in a world where *too many of us* believe that there are only *two ways* of looking at things: there is **my** way, and there is the *wrong* way. And those who are *stupid* enough to *think* the wrong way need to be belittled and made fun of and, preferably, destroyed, as publicly and humiliatingly as possible, in order to show the rest of the world just how right ***I*** am in my point of view, and how wrong **they** are. If showing the world that ***I*** am right means I send troops to a little out of the way, backwater burg, to slaughter a few toddlers that *no one* other than their pathetic parents are going to miss, then I do it, because that's what makes **me** right, and everybody else wrong. Because **that's** the kind of world we live in.

And **that**, brothers and sisters, is a very *lousy* way to live.

There are stories like this one, of Herod ordering the deaths of children in our scripture, because things like this happen all the time. Killings happen nearly every day: the Kalamazoo Michigan Uber shootings of February 2016; Las Vegas Harvest Music Festival October 2017; Santa Fe High School, May 2018; the El Paso Texas Walmart shootings, August of this year; or just yesterday, a car bomb in Mogadishu.

There are other tragedies, like:

- \$ this week, three family members – father, son & daughter – who all drowned, the males trying to save the nine-year-old girl on the day before Christmas;
- \$ The typhoon that has just killed at least thirteen people in the Philippines;
- \$ The Indonesia tsunami of December 26, 2004.

And we can keep going.

People question: *Why does God **do** these things?* And I have to answer simply: *God doesn't.* God didn't cause a man to hate so much that he shot people as they were going in to worship in New Zealand. God didn't cause an underwater earthquake, in order to induce a wave of gigantic proportions, that is attributed to over 230,000 deaths. Some of these things that have happened are natural; and many of them are human made.

Bad things happen. Death happens. Pain happens. And in all that pain and hurt and suffering, what we need to remember – what those of us who are marked by the waters of our baptism **know** – is that God chose to walk this world with us. We know that God loved us so much, as to become one of these finite, limited, bags of flesh and bone. God is right here, walking with us. God doesn't **cause** the pain and sorrow and hurt. Yet God *knows* what it is to weep and grieve and suffer.

There are *wonderful* passages in scripture, passages that talk about joy and grace, that speak of peace and hope. The passages like this one today, though, that help remind us that scripture is still **relevant** in twenty-first century North America. Because this passage, as painful as it is to hear, also reminds us that, no matter what happens, God remains with us. This passage helps remind us that, no matter what, God brings us hope.

Maybe you missed it, as I have, in all the times that I have read this passage. We heard read to us that God sent Joseph and family to Egypt to avoid certain death by Herod, just like centuries previously, God sent Jacob and his family to Egypt to avoid death by famine. God then called Jacob's descendants out of Egypt, back to safety and prosperity and faith that they could find in Palestine. God called Jesus out of Egypt, in order to lead the

descendants, not just of Jacob but the descendants of **all** humanity, to safety and prosperity and faith through the cross.

Jesus the savior, born in Bethlehem, came out of Egypt, to be despised from Nazareth, and **still** be the savior of us all. Jesus knows how full of pain our lives can be. He was born to take that pain on himself. He came to tell us we are loved. He came to tell us we are forgiven. He lived in order to tell us that we don't have to hold onto the pain all by ourselves.

Sisters and brothers, when your life is too full of pain, let him walk with you. Amen.

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