

# 1 CHRISTMAS DECEMBER 26, 2010 CYCLE "A"

**TITLE: GO KILL THAT CHILD!**

**READINGS: Isa. 63:7-9, Ps. 148, Heb. 2:10-18, Matthew 2:13-23**

Some time ago there was a lady who shared a decades-old humiliation at an Al-Anon meeting. She had borrowed her mother's shoes to wear to the high school prom, because she wanted to look really sharp. In the middle of the dance, in front of every one of her friends, her drunken mother staggered in, barely able to stand, reeking of liquor. In her mother's hands was a pair of her own shoes. She had no place to hide, no hole opened up to swallow her. Her mortification was displayed for all to see. Even decades later, she could not recount the story without choking up and re-living that abusive humiliation.

Parents, leaders, those who are given the responsibility to guide and direct children can be ugly and abusive. Sometimes parents betray their children verbally, emotionally, physically, sexually. The childhood that could be marked by innocence becomes a horror. Sometime back police in Phoenix found twin boys who had been locked in cages by their parents. Even though they were five years old, they could not talk, not even one word! They were abusively scarred for life. It is not only some parents, but public leaders, members of the clergy and church leaders who abuse children in such scandalous ways! Pedophilia and other horrendous abuses leave an even deeper scar when perpetrated by a priest, a church leader, or someone else who has been given authority over children. Our trust in parents, leaders and others in positions of leadership can be destroyed. Our faith, too, can be mangled at times, beyond repair.

I often wonder, then, how in the world those poor parents ever managed to put a life together again after the horrendous slaughter of their innocent babies in today's Gospel reading. Matthew had just given us the account of our Prince of Peace, of the abundant joy and rejoicing of the heavenly hosts at his birth, of the visit of the Magi and the gifts to celebrate the coming of our Messiah. And now Joseph and Mary had to escape with Jesus to Egypt. Why? "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more." Matt.2:18. King Herod had ordered his soldiers to "Go kill that child!" Slaughter the innocents! He had, "sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under." Matt.2:16.

So what is Herod doing in the Christmas story? How did this despicable character get tied to the wonder and glory of heaven touching earth through the birth

of salvation wrapped in swaddling clothes? In all of Christian history, there may not have been anyone as vile and evil as Herod. He couldn't stand to have any competition; no one would challenge his throne! Herod had to snuff out that newborn king. His paranoia caused him to try to murder the hope of the world. So what can we learn from this terrible man? We learn that Herod reminds us why Jesus came. Jesus came to die for us. From the time of his very birth, his Father wants us to know that he is to be, just as Simeon prophesied, "destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." Lk.2:34-35. Unfortunately, we live in a sinful world. And even at Christmas, with the promise of peace and hope on our lips in our hearts, that sinfulness is still present. That sinfulness was personified in the first Christmas story by Herod.

Besides reminding us why Jesus came to our world, Herod also reminds us that we need Jesus in our lives. Juxtaposed against Herod's corruption, greed and villainy is this tiny helpless baby. A baby born to a poor, simple, humble virgin, into a lowly carpenter's family, yet this child grows to become the King of Kings, the one who overcomes both sin and death. The Savior, who gives us hope, offers us eternal life and bought the forgiveness of our sins through the cross. We need Jesus; we need him in our lives if we are to be saved, if we are to share his Kingdom, his peace, his glory. We need what Jesus did for us and does for us each and every day:

We need the Hope only he can bring.

We need the Forgiveness that only he can offer.

We need the Unconditional Love that only he can share.

We need the Eternal life that only he can give.

We need the Redemption that only he can promise.

We need Jesus.

What Herod missed that first Christmas was God's blatant public act of generosity in the birth of Jesus, because in Jesus God was giving himself to us. Herod couldn't look up. He couldn't get past himself. He missed it. We don't dare miss it! Just make sure you look up and see the star this year. Make sure you make that trip to Bethlehem and peer into the stable. See the child. Don't be like Herod and miss the greatest gift ever given. **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**