

Sermon for Christmass 2 – Matthew 2:13-23

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“[The Lord said to Joseph,] ‘... Herod is about the search for the child, to destroy Him.’” As always, the devil tried to thwart God’s plans. He tried to remove Jesus from the world again.

Satan had a willing instrument in his scheme to put the Christ child away in King Herod. This Judean dictator was suspicious by nature and hungry for power. The death of the Christ would also suit Herod’s interests. The newborn King of the Jews had to die.

But King Herod was grossly mistaken. The newborn King’s intentions were different. 5th century hymn writer Coelius Sedulius would remind Judea’s governor: “The star proclaims the King is here;/But Herod, why this senseless fear?/For He who offers heav’nly birth/Seeks not the kingdoms of this earth.” Christ’s intent was not to take away Herod’s kingdom, but to open the realms of God’s heavenly kingdom to everybody. For even as a young child, Christ is the King who rules over all creation. He governs and protects His Kingdom of Grace, which we call His Church on earth. Also, He leads His Kingdom of Grace into His Kingdom of Glory in heaven.

What does this mean for us? Those tyrants and jailors (like Herod and the Devil) are all expelled now. In their place has come Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life, Who is righteousness, salvation, and every blessing. He delivers us poor, lost people from hell’s jaws. He has won us. He makes us free. He brings us again into the Father’s favor and grace. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Christ takes us as His own property. We’re under His shelter and protection. He governs us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness, and we serve Him in the same. The newborn King opens heaven to us.

Herod couldn’t see this. He saw only a threat to his throne, a threat to his power. After being tricked by the Wise men, Herod was bent on removing this threat. He ordered his soldiers to murder every boy of 2 years old and younger. But God saw through Herod’s plans. He warned Joseph, who gathered his young family and fled in the middle of the night to Egypt in order to save the Baby’s life. Try as he might, the Devil could not remove Christ from the world.

But does not the Devil still try to remove Jesus today? Today is January 5th. And January 5th is the 12th day of Christmass. Yep, the 12 days of Christmass are an actual Christian custom and not just a whimsical song about a lover giving a multitude of birds, jewelry, and servants to his beloved. While the rest of the world has stopped saying “Merry Christmass” almost 2 weeks ago (if they even were saying it in the first place!) we can still say it today. Well, at least until tonight, for then Epiphany begins. Stay tuned. There’ll be more on that here, tomorrow night at 7pm.

But the Devil still tries to remove Jesus today. He seeks to put in His place the commercialism of our time. The evil foe seeks to eliminate Christmass or “Christ” “Mass” as it were. “Christ”-God

born in flesh in Bethlehem and “Mass”-God dwelling with His people in the flesh of His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. Remember Christmass—the true reason for the season. Forgetting about the historical Jesus in the Scriptures or neglecting Him in His Body and Blood in the Sacrament is no small victory for the Devil, at any time this year.

After some time in Egypt, the devil’s servant King Herod died, and finally the day came when Joseph and family could return to Judea. But not to Bethlehem. In Bethlehem, they would be only 6 miles away from Jerusalem, where Archelaus, Herod’s son ruled. The son of the tyrant undoubtedly had his father’s lust for power and paranoia over losing it. Joseph chose to go back to Nazareth, as Matthew’s Gospel tells us.

St. Matthew knew his Old Testament. He read it in the same way as all the devout people did in that day. What happened to God’s people would happen again and lead them forward. God had at one time led Israel out of Egypt. Egypt was the land of bondage. But it was also the richest and most powerful land, the land of bodily comforts. Egypt was the land that was full of wisdom, fortune tellers, secret arts, and temples. They had remarkable creations from highly developed techniques. In all we call civilization, Egypt excelled over Israel by leaps and bounds! “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.”

When God led Israel out of Egypt, He knew that the Word He had given His people was more than anything the world could offer. During the time of Moses, God triumphed over all of Egypt’s wisdom and all of Pharaoh’s military power. And God showed again, when He brought His Son out of Egypt, that His weakness was stronger than men’s strength. He showed that He had called His people, His Son, His Church out of spiritual Egypt, out of the security of creature comforts, away from the wisdom that demands guarantees for everything. His Kingdom is not of this world. That’s why it can’t be conquered!

When God makes His plans work, He can afford to squander. The boys in Bethlehem died so Jesus could live. The Church has always recognized them as the first martyrs. That means that those who gave their lives for Jesus also received life—eternal life! God also gives you also a hundredfold again in His kingdom. He dries the tears that are shed in your desperate and tormented lives. This is precisely what He does today when He opens His kingdom’s gates for you. And on the last day, there will be no more worries or complaints or persecution.

Just as Christ came to us in the midst of our sorrows, miseries, and tragedies, so you also, bring mercy to all who suffer because of human cruelty. Not just in foreign lands and local shelters, but in your own families and in your own homes. With understanding and compassion, be willing to serve those whom God has put in your life. Be faithful and persevere because God desires to reach them through you. Thwart the Devil’s plans. Jesus lives. To Him alone be all glory and honor, forever and ever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠