

Sermon for the Holy Innocent Martyrs – Matthew 2:13-18

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

Today we celebrate the Holy Innocent Martyrs – they were the young boys 2 years and under who were carelessly murdered when King Herod sought to kill the Christ child born in Bethlehem. In this season of joy, it's odd isn't it? Just 3 days ago we marveled and rejoiced at the birth of Jesus, our Savior. Today is the 4th day of Christmas, so shouldn't we be singing about "4 calling birds, 3 French hens, 2 turtledoves, and a partridge in a pear tree"? Instead, we hear loud wailing mothers in agony over their little sons who have been decapitated and thrust through with swords. It just seems a little out of place, doesn't it?

But God didn't spin the wheel of fortune when He sent His Son to earth. When Jesus was born, nothing happened by chance. Not by some role of the dice was He conceived without a human father. For as Adam had only God as his Father, so also the New Adam comes to be Head of a new humanity. Not by accident was He born in David's hometown, for He is the Son of David, come to reign forever over the Kingdom of God. And so also it wasn't just "bad luck" that a tyrant king named Herod wanted Him dead. While every other baby boy lost his life in Bethlehem that grim night, One did not, that He might later die for those who died on account of Him. In Jesus, history repeats itself. Or said more properly: history is repeated and completed in Him.

Remember what happened to our forefathers in Egypt? To save his own political neck, a tyrant king named Pharaoh ordered the murder of every Israelite boy. Their infant lungs were engulfed in the waters of the Nile. Ripped from the breast, they were fed to the river. All but one boy. He was delivered from the tyrant's hand, this babe named Moses, for by his hand, God would deliver His people from Egypt. Moses was reared by the princess, and then flees Egypt at age 40 when Pharaoh seeks to kill him. Until the age of 80, he lives the life of a shepherd, till those who sought his life are dead. Then he returns to the land of captivity – returns as God's agent of deliverance, returns to lead them out of death through the waters of the Red Sea, as he himself was saved from the waters in the days of his infancy.

"And so, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, that He might redeem you who were" enslaved in an Egypt far worse than the Egypt of old. For as hardhearted as was Pharaoh, he is nothing compared to the tyrant of hell under whose rule you were born. As cruel as was the slavery of our fathers in Egypt, it is no match for the torturous shackles of sin and shame, guilt and death that tightly chain our souls.

From this Egypt of sin ruled by the Satanic Pharaoh, a new and better Moses was sent to free you. But as it was for young Moses, so it was for the Son of Mary. To save

his own political neck, Herod wants Him dead. So he sends his soldiers to Bethlehem, to turn their streets into another Nile River, another infant graveyard. But only 1 is delivered from the tyrant's hand that day. He is delivered so that He might deliver those who died. He was delivered so that He might deliver you. To Egypt Jesus is carried, biding His time, as Moses did of old, until those who sought His life were dead. Then He returns—returns as God's ultimate agent of deliverance, returns to lead you out of death through the waters of the Font, a Red Sea made crimson on the Friday we call Good.

For you, dear Christian, Jesus repeats and completes the life of Moses. He had to, because all have repeated the rebellion of Adam. All have consumed the fruit of which Eve took the first bite. But unlike noble Bethlehem mothers who sought to hide their precious sons, we conceal a far more sinister child: our Old Adam and his vile works. We have kept the mask of outward goodness so long, we no longer remember the real us—the real ugliness—that lurks underneath. But God sees. We've tucked away those shameful sins so deeply in our conscience that only occasionally now do they creep upward. But God sees. We've gotten so used to comparing ourselves to others—and thereby excusing our actions—that we've forgotten that God doesn't care how we stack up to others. His only concern is whether we've kept His law, perfectly and perpetually. And we haven't. And God sees.

Repent. For it is you that Jesus came to deliver. For though He sees the real you, though He sees very well all the ugliness you try so hard to hide from Him, from others, and even from yourself—though He sees all this, most of all He sees the one He loves, His child captive in the Egypt of sin: you, His beloved one.

For you this new and better Moses was born. For you He was spared from the sword of Herod. For you He was called out of Egypt. For you He was called to the cross. For you He suffered the whips, the thorns, the nails, the bleeding and dying. For you He was called back to life. For you He held in His hands the shackles of sin and death that once bound you, and shattered them by His grace. You He carries out of Egypt, across the font of the Red Sea, and to the Promised Land. You he feeds with manna from on high, gives you crimson drink from the Rock of His Flesh.

History is not only repeated and completed in Jesus; it's done with your salvation in view. That's what matters to God. That's what He wants most. He wants you. And you He has. Thanks be to Him. Amen.

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

**Much of this sermon was direct quotation from Christ Crucified (pg. 42-44) by the Rev. C. L. Bird, published in 2005.*