

CHRISTMAS 2

January 2 2022

Genesis 46:1-7

I Peter 4:12-19

Matthew 2:13-23

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas morning we rejoiced
with the shepherds and the angels and the whole heavenly host
that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).
The next day, Sunday, the altar was no longer white, but red...
as we heard the account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen.

Today, we hear of a great atrocity,
the slaughter of the infants called the Holy Innocents,
commemorated this past Tuesday.
So, during the twelve days of Christmas we go from Holy Birth,
to the first martyr, to the wickedness of men
lead by the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:11),
who sought to kill this Holy Child. Let us pray.

These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

When the Eternal God became Flesh,
that ancient serpent of old (Rev. 20:2) the devil himself—sought to destroy Him.
Now, this was not the first time the Prince of Darkness,
who originally desired his throne to be exalted
above the angels of God, yet was cut down to the ground,
had waged war against the Lord and his anointed (Psalm 2:2).
The Old Testament records many times how the devil
unsuccessfully sought to wipe out the Seed—
the Seed that would crush his own head
(Genesis 3:15).¹

¹ See Revelation 12:1-6.

Thus, when it comes to the Incarnation of our Lord—things are no different.

When the promised Son of Abraham is born,

Evil lusts for His Holy life.

And the devil, *using means*, finds a willing foot-soldier in Herod.

Pride and arrogance, conceit and egotism,

all the sins that felled the first Man, overtake Herod,

and the lust of his heart is made manifest

in a blood-lust for the young life

of the Promised Son of Abraham.

After hearing from the Wise Men about their search for the Messiah,

and learning from the scroll of Micah that the true King of Israel was living

in nearby Bethlehem, this petty regional ruler—

who feared the presence of the true King,

determines that his competition needs to be eliminated.

And in His State of Humiliation,

that Divine Child,

Almighty God Enfleshed,

the Lord God of Sabaoth

(which means Commander in Chief of all the angelic armies)—

He was helpless...to defend Himself.

So, God uses means.

Joseph, the earthly guardian of the Son of God,

receives a heaven-sent dream.

An angel directs him to protect the Virgin's Son by fleeing

in the middle of the night,

just as his ancestors had done in the past,

down to Egypt.

Get Jesus out of Herod's jurisdiction *now*.

Protect Him.

Who's going to finance this late night, urgent trip?

Well, God had already done so.

For what was one of the gifts the Wise Men brought to the Holy Family?

Gold.

Provided just in time.

Can you imagine how intense this night was?

"Mary – Mary – wake up...we've got to go."

"Go where?"

"Egypt."

"Egypt? Where'd you come up with that?"

"An angel told me..."

"When do we have to go?"

"Right Now."

"Right Now? That's 75 miles, just to the boarder..."

"I know."

"Can't we leave in the morning?"

"Mary – they're coming after Jesus..."

Mary's eyes go wide.

She jumps out of bed, and grabs everything essential.

Joseph gets Jesus,

and they leave everything else right there.

Folks, this was so intense!

Time was of the essence.

But get that—

God, who alone is omnipotent,

who took on our flesh and was born a helpless Infant,

He needed to be protected

by His own creatures.

And so it was that the True Israel found safety

in the very place where Israel had once known bondage.

He came to His own, but His own received Him not. (John 1:11)

Well, the blood-lust of Herod was not sated.

Deceived and angry his thirst for retribution brought forth

one of the greatest atrocities of fallen man.

A two-year age limit was determined to try to prevent Jesus' escape,

for Herod thought surely the Child would fit into that time frame.

His order was executed swiftly,

because Bethlehem isn't five miles from Jerusalem.

The soldiers were there in no time at all.

When they arrive, they search house to house, leaving no stone unturned.
 They chase fleeing mothers who clutch their little boys to their chests,
 and fight off daddies who tried to protect their family.
 It was no match really...
 no match at all.

The blood of those precious boys wet the sands of Bethlehem
 and stained the floorboards of their homes.

This was a nightmare.
 A nightmare in Bethlehem because of Herod's jealousy and rage.
 And who stood behind it all, pulling the strings?
 The devil did—
 whom Jesus would say
 was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

As I stated earlier, we call these boys the Holy Innocents,
 for they committed no crime worthy of Herod's death sentence.
 No—they were not born holy, nor were they born innocent.
 They were, as any man born of a human father, conceived and born in sin.
 This means their flesh was no different than yours.
 However, the Church has long taught that their deaths,
 as they were innocent of any crime that merited death,
 be counted as martyrdom,
 because their lives were given
 to protect the Divine Child.

As God the Son is whisked to Egyptian safety by Joseph,
 God the Son is shielded from Herod's blade by the Holy Innocents.
 Think of them as human shields that protected the Child of Mary,
 with their blood running so that His be spared,
 for a time.

This horrible night quenched Herod's blood-lust,
 but the devil who stood behind it all would attack again.

This night in Bethlehem fulfilled prophecy, as so much of Jesus' birth and life did.
 Back in the days of Jeremiah, some seven centuries before...
 Israel's mothers were weeping because their sons were being killed
 or taken into the captivity of Babylon—

Think Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 How do you think their mothers
 reacted to their enslavement and deportation?
 Well, St. Matthew cites that reference here,
 as fitting perfectly with the grief the mothers
 of Bethlehem experienced
 whose infant sons were so
 viciously slaughtered.

So, the One that was born both Holy and Innocent—Jesus Himself.
 dwelt safely in the land of Pharoah until Herod died.

Herod's death was a relief to many.
 And Josephus records that he died of
 "...ulcerated entrails, putrefied and maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions,
 foul breath, and neither physicians nor warm baths led to recovery."²
 I would say this was a rather fitting end to this man.
 But before he died,
 he divided his kingdom into three parts,
 giving each area to one of his three sons—
 the three sons he didn't execute.

Herod Antipas took over the area of Galilee up in the north.
 Philip, the area further north,
 and Archelaus took over the area of Judea—
 Bethlehem of Judea.

Archelaus was known for his ruthlessness.
 And when Joseph learned that Archelaus was reigning over Judea,
 he feared he'd be as vicious as his ungodly father.
 So, Joseph was very hesitant about putting his family within his reach.
 After being told to return,
 the Holy Family make their way back from Egypt
 to settle in Nazareth—to where it all began,
 where Joseph was summoned to show up for the census.
 And there, Jesus of Nazareth continues to grow in wisdom,
 stature, in favor with God and with man (Luke 2:52).

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.6.5.

You know, Archelaus was so bad that Rome replaced him.
 Folks, when Rome replaces you, you know you're bad news.
 But they replaced him with a fellow you've heard of...
 a fellow by the name of Pontius Pilate.

And what Herod did not accomplish, by means of the devil, Pilate would.
 Not by sword, but by the cross.

And this time, Jesus did not flee again to Egypt,
 rather He submitted—willingly—
 to shams trials filled with accusations and lies,
 willingly to an excruciating scourge,
 and willingly to being mocked while made to wear a purple robe.

Then, the Son of God that Joseph once protected
 hung completely unprotected, bearing your sins,
 suspended between God and man,
 between heaven and earth.
 His Precious Blood didn't stain
 the sands of Bethlehem.
 They stained the sands of Golgotha.
 All the while the devil rejoiced...*"Finally!"*

But what the devil didn't know is that in that Blood—in the Blood of Christ,
 there is life for you—there is salvation for you.
 For He, being the One who is Holy and Innocent, bore your sins,
 including the sins of Pharoah, Pilate—and even Herod the Great.
 The Water and the Blood that poured forth
 testify to the full price He paid for your transgressions.
 And the empty tomb testifies to His victory
 over sin and death—
 His final, great victory
 over that dark, ancient, evil foe.

And to you, you who believe in Him,
 you who have faith in His Name,
 He imputes His perfect righteousness to you,
 that you be declared holy and innocent before God.
 And in His Blood, the very Blood you drink this day,
 all your sins are forgiven.

The Son of God who was protected from Herod's sword by the Holy Innocents
is the Son of God who died for you.
And now He, not the baby boys of Bethlehem,
but He protects you from death and the devil by His
precious death and glorious resurrection.
For that He was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary.
For that He was made Man.
For that He was born in Bethlehem.
Born for you.
So rejoice, dear Christian,
and receive the joy
that this Christmas season brings.
For in Christ, you are safe.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and
minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.