

The Second Sunday after Christmas
2 January, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 2:13-23
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Beloved children of God, the cross of our Lord Jesus was a constant presence in His life. From the moment He entered this world, this world sought to remove Him from it. Before He had even opened His mouth to unleash the fiery two-edged sword of His Word, He was deemed a threat. Now, Herod, the puppet prince, had only his little throne in Judea in mind, but the prince of darkness knew that this child was his undoing. This was the promised Seed of the woman who would crush his head. Thus in his blind rage, Satan tried to snuff out Jesus' life before He could ever reach the cross.

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed...” Driven out of the Promised Land and back into Egypt, the Son of God, even in His youth, takes our suffering and sorrow upon Himself. I'm sure Joseph and Mary were looking forward to going back home and settling down and raising their new baby. I'm sure they were looking forward to having a normal life, or, at least as normal as it can be when your child is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Shouldn't having Jesus make life better and easier?

Clearly not. Just the opposite. Jesus is an existential threat to the devil and the wicked world. Jesus pulls back the curtain to expose their evil deeds and their unrighteousness. He threatens their positions. More than a threat, Jesus arrives as the conqueror of both. So of course the anger of the devil and his world are stirred and they will rise up against the Christ and any who dare to be with Him. False teachers, persecutions, false accusations, and even martyrdom. No one and nothing are off limits. Joseph and Mary, along with their Son, are hunted, forced to flee from the temple and dwell away from the land of God's people.

And while to them, as it does to you, the hour of persecution feels chaotic and out-of-control, all happens according to the perfect will of God who uses even the wicked intentions of men to accomplish His good and gracious will. The reality is that the world is a very dark place because of sin. We are rightly appalled at the heinous actions of Herod, indiscriminately slaughtering baby boys in order to prevent the King of the Jews from coming and taking his rule away from him. No

less heinous things are done today so that the king of our sinful Adam can maintain his rule over our hearts and minds. Innocents are slaughtered. Mountains of lies are told. Martyrs still spill their blood. The faithful are imprisoned. And those are just the obvious sufferings of the saints. The pressure to remain silent about right and wrong or lose your job. The bitter hatred of family who find the Christian faith repugnant. Laws proposed to make it harder to conduct your public life in accordance with the faith you confess in this building and in your home.

The cross was constant for Jesus. It will be constant for you, His beloved children, His body. The world hated Him and it hates you. Even your own flesh is a treacherous traitor and is always seeking to hand you over to evil deeds and the will of the devil. We cry out to our Father, who is in heaven, longing to leave this world and be instead in the Promised Land, where He is.

Do not despair. As the Lord protected the Holy Family and brought them up out of Egypt just as God promised through the prophets, and just as God has His hand firmly in control as the Herods of the world lash out and destroy any and everything that gets in their way, He will most certainly keep you in safety. He will sustain you in this time of sojourning and simply surviving. All that the devil and the world do to seek to harm you, Your heavenly Father will turn to your blessing.

Though Christ was spared Herod's wrath, that was only a temporary reprieve. He was born that one day He would die at the hands of wicked men, some who claimed to be persecuting a blasphemer of God and others who had no use for the true God at all. But that too was according to plan. That death was the death for the whole world. That death crushed the kingdom of the devil, robbing the devil of his single greatest weapon against you - your guilt. The suffering and death of God's Son made your death good because your death is now but a falling asleep to await the resurrection to eternal life. Your suffering and death here on this earth have been sanctified by the suffering and death of Jesus so that your sufferings and death are His. And when His glory is revealed, all who laughed at you and reviled you and sought to harm you will be put to shame as they see that they were reviling the Redeemer.

Do not be surprised when you suffer for the Name of Christ. But also do not despair. Entrust yourself to God who has purchased you with the Blood of His Son and has given you the Spirit. He will strengthen you and uphold you and finally bring you out of this Egypt of hardship and grant you the eternal rest of His kingdom.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.