

## Matthew 2:13–23

Grace Mercy peace are now yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

What has happened in our Gospel reading for this Sunday? Today's Gospel reading is one of those readings that we find it rather difficult to respond praise to you O Christ when we hear it. Just a few days ago the mood and tone of our text was much different. The message we looked at then was all about the promised birth of the long awaited one. For a single moment everything around us stopped. The whole world seemed to come screeching to a halt to peer at this child in His mother's arms. It was a peaceful, silent night where curiosity and joy were to be found. It was a world of angels delivering messages to shepherds in their fields at night, it was a world of childlike wonder and joy at the birth of our savior, Immanuel, God with us in the flesh. A day celebrated with presents, time with family and a candlelight service in our church.

The beauty, wonder and joy of Christmas seems to be sullied with our Gospel reading. Today's reading seems to rip us right out of this idealistic Christmas world we found ourselves in a few days ago and into a horrific scene of violence and persecution. The holy family is fleeing from the first recorded persecution of Jesus which is at the hands of Herod. The idealist Christmas story told a few days ago is now meeting with the cold hard reality of the world that we live in. While here in America it is rare to come across and shocking when it does, violence and fleeing are common across our modern world. Wars leave families searching for a new place to call home, violence leads to death and displacement. Political power gained or maintained at any cost, even horrific acts of killing are not unknown to us and our modern memories. The death of these innocent, while shocking and difficult to read are certainly unknown to a world full of death and violence.

These acts have even happened before in the narrative of scripture. I would like to bring you back to the book of Exodus. Pharaoh looks out at his country and sees a threat to His throne. A prosperous people of Jacob have been growing in number and wealth. To keep these people in check and Pharaoh in power, he enslaves all of the people of God and puts out a decree. All male Hebrew children are to be killed, they are to be thrown into the Nile. In the middle of this crisis, God saves a child. A child by the name of Moses by floating Him in a basket down the river. Moses, by God's grace narrowly

avoids death at the hands of Pharaoh and will later be the one chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity in Egypt. God uses Moses to save His people from the evil of Pharaoh and their slavery in Egypt.

What is even more shocking about our passage today is that it is not some foreign power oppressing the people of God. It isn't a foreign king holding God's people in slavery killing the innocent. Instead we have a horrific image of king Herod. The one who expanded the Temple and renovated it carrying out these horrific deeds. God's people in this moment, look like the rest of the world. Their messiah is in their midst, God is with them, Immanuel is born. Yet Herod does not see their savior, but Herod sees the end of his reign and does everything he can to kill this threat. He does everything he can to make sure that his power is maintained. Herod reflects more pharaoh than the people of God.

So in a sick sense of Irony, an angel appears to the Holy family in a dream, commanding Joseph to take His family and run. The Holy family flees into Egypt at the angel's direction to avoid Herod's reach. The place God needed to rescue His people from is now the place where His son will seek refuge.

So why do we read this passage? Why do we take this time on the first Sunday of Christmas to reflect upon a horrific action done almost 2000 years ago? On Christmas day we talked about what the meaning of this Christmas season was all about. In the prophet Isaiah we heard how beautiful are the feet of those who bear good news. This Christmas season is all about good news. The good news that despite the evil in the world, despite the horrors we see in our lives or read about on the pages of Scripture, Our God reigns. Our king was born. God in the flesh, Immanuel God with us. Our king Jesus is coming to set us captives free. Set us free from sin and death that we might have life eternal with Him.

This Gospel reading today helps us contrast the people of Israel, Herod's kingdom with this God of ours who reigns. Herod acted no differently than the nations of old, he acted no differently than the nation God had to rescue His people from. Through the testimony of the wise men Herod saw Jesus as a threat to his rule and authority rather than the promised king who was now here. Herod rejects this Jesus and seeks to put Him to death before he can threaten His kingdom. This king stands as a representation of the whole people Herod rules. For the people will act much in the same way. They too will

see this messiah, this king firsthand. They will hear him preach, hear him teach and do wonderous signs and miracles. Yet they too will not believe. They too will persecute Jesus and will ultimately kill him. They will reject their king.

Our Gospel reading invites us to compare the reign of Herod with that of our King Jesus. Our Lord and savior does what Israel and Herod could not do. Jesus through His birth, through his taking on our flesh, now stands for all people. Where Herod and by extension the people of God fail Jesus will be perfect. Jesus will do what they cannot do. He will face temptation and withstand it. He will succeed where God's people failed generation after generation. He will be asked to fall down and worship others and He will remain faithful. Unlike His ancestors who fell before many different idols made of stone, metal and wood. He will be persecuted, beaten and ultimately killed, but He will not be shaken from what the Father has called him to do. Jesus the king of kings and Lord of Lords will do what His people cannot do. He will be perfectly faithful in all things until the end. Where all earthly powers will give way and fall aside and look like the evil in the world, our king will prevail.

This Christmas message of good news is good news for you and for me as we reflect on this passage this morning. Christ our king does for us what we cannot do ourselves. Where each and every one of us fails this child born of Mary will live perfectly. We think of the times that we have been tempted and did not resist the temptation. The call to sin that enticed our hearts and lead us to abandon the way God has called us to live. The moment of greed, of Lust or anger that captures our hearts and leads us into sin. Where we fall into temptation, Christ our king prevails. We are prone to let other things besides our God shape the priorities of our life. Our careers, our financial security, our reputations and many other things can begin to dictate our lives to us. They become what we look for all good gifts from, and they step in the place of God. They become idols that we worship with our love and affection. Where our hearts are prone to stray, our King's heart never strays. When we falter in the face of persecution, or we reject who we are in the faith in the face of social pressure or scorn, we turn against our God. When words, or deeds of others make us forget, or make us afraid to say who we are in Jesus we reject him. Where we fail in the face of pressure and persecution, our savior's course remains.

This course begins when our savior will walk from Egypt of all places. This child is called out of Egypt with a ironic phrase: Rise, take the child and his mother and go to

the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." Our king who faces temptation, idolatry and persecution and is victorious now also leaves Egypt into the hands of the ones who will seek his life. While Herod has died, Jesus goes to lay down His own life. Jesus and His perfect life, takes on the sin of the world. Each time each of us and all creation fell into temptation, had their hearts pulled away by an idol or faltered under pressure and persecution. All of this goes onto our kings shoulders on the cross. Where the perfect one stands in place for all of us, taking on our sin and giving to us His righteousness.

As we are all baptized into this Christ, we are made a new creation in Jesus. We got to see this wonderful miracle today as Otto was just made a new creation. Our King does not leave us to be destroyed in our sins, but makes us new, forgives us our sins and credits to us His perfection over our sins and faults. In his resurrection we have a picture of what one day will be each of ours. This new life with our king will be glorious, perfect and without pain and suffering. What a hope we have in Jesus. In our passage we see what the reign of sin and death looks like. It is anger, envy, evil and even murder. Herod shows us the darkest side of all of our hearts, He shows us the evils of sin. Yet in our King Jesus we are brought to a fulness of life that we cannot comprehend until we are there with Him one day. Our future is certain with our savior who conquered all sin, idolatry, persecution, and even death and brings us to himself.

Our King still reigns in the here in now. Jesus reigns even when evil like the actions of Herod take place, or when we see this evil in our own lives. As baptized children of God we are subjects of our king and as Immanuel He is with us as we go through the evil of this world. Our King is our source of strength as we face the temptations of this world. The one who was tempted walks with us as we are tempted. When the things of this world call out to us for us to live against who we are as subjects of Jesus, our King is there to give us strength and to trample the evil one. Where greed, lust and anger would seize us and encourage us to sin, our savior comes to us with the Holy Spirit to guide us and crush the voice of the enemy. When you face temptation, lean on the one who was victorious in the face of it. As we find things in this world seeking for us to worship it by giving it control of our lives turn to the one who is already reigning and in control. Seek his mercies and seek him where He is to be found. Fall before the throne of our king as He gives to you His word, His grace and His love. Seek Him where He promises to be as we meet together in this place to enjoy His wonderful benefits and give him our praise. As you face persecution and pressure for being a Christian, seek the aid of the

one who endured it all for you. Seek the aid of the one who was steadfast in the walk to the cross. Seek patience in suffering from the one who suffered all.

While this passage might not fit into the ideal telling of the Christmas story, The good news of Christmas is that the good news meets the reality of the world that we live in. Where sin and evil is we remember the good news: Our God Reigns. It is in this hope we patiently await His return. In Jesus name we pray; amen.