

Sermon- Dec.. 29-30, 2007  
Matthew 2:13-23  
Pr. Tom Schoenherr

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm all is bright..."

"O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie,  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by..."

Bethlehem may have been anything but "silent", "still" or "sleeping" after the first Christmas. In our text for Holy Innocents, we are blown back into reality by the cold, icy wind of Herod's decree to kill all the children 2 years old and younger. Christmas comes in the midst of suffering and death. The angel again comes to Joseph and he is obedient to the message. He takes Mary and the young Jesus to Egypt to wait until Herod is dead. Still there are a number of children who lost their lives because of Jesus, announced by the wise men as "King of the Jews", a threat to Herod's power. Joseph and Mary must have been scared as they traveled, and Joseph always looking over his shoulder to see who might be following them.

We like to picture peaceful scenes and sparkly snow-covered hillsides and happy people at Christmas, but the reality is that people are really hurting, suffering at the time of Jesus' birth. Children are still dying and their mothers and fathers are weeping over them in many parts of our world.

We don't live in a protected Christmas card world. We live in a world where children die, and some bring death to others. We live in a world where mothers and fathers cry and grieve, not just in hospitals, but in city streets, grass and mud huts and frame homes. In our world those who oppress and seek to destroy others seem to be able often to get away with it.

Christmas echoes the song of the angels for peace and good will among all people, but our best compassionate actions have not erased the oppression of power-hungry rulers, gun violence, child hunger and malnutrition, people warring over water and oil. Darfur and other parts of the Sudan, other parts of Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and our own country hear the mourning cries of Rachel weeping for her children for they are no more.

What makes it more real is that no one is exempt. Not even Jesus or any of us will be able to get out of life without dying. If we were to stop here this would truly be a depressing text.

Our hope and help come from this same Jesus Christ whose life is threatened by Herod. Jesus' name means "save" and Emmanuel means "God with us."

As Jesus returns to Nazareth from Egypt, and as he grows in his ministry he faces the powers of evil in the world. He eventually dies on the cross, entering into this world of sorrow, tears and death to bring us healing and hope.

God delivers his people from slavery in Egypt and returns them to the promised land. God returns his people from exile in Babylon to Israel. God weeps with people who suffer and God brings hope to all people. Violence and destruction is not the last word to God's people. God brings us through the water of Baptism and the power of his love to unite us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus comes to our aid and weeps with us in our suffering and losses.

We will always have despots like Herod, Archalaus, Hitler, Amin, Stalin and terrorists who bring violence to protect their power. They will not have the last word. Mothers and fathers will still weep for their children. We are not protected

from these terrible people or situations just because we are Christians. Our faith holds on to God who holds on to us. In the midst of these fearful tragedies of loss, God's love for us will lead us even through death itself in an everlasting relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus weeps with us and for us. Neither death nor life nor principalities or powers will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our loving God comes to live with us in a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem.

We may not be able to bring an end to violence in Jerusalem and Gaza, Iraq or Sudan or Afghanistan, or the violence in Pakistan and in our own country. We may not be able to empty hospitals and free people from tragedies, but we can join our voices with Rachel's and with God's and weep and listen and pray. God listens and responds, and we hold on to God's promise and pray more fervently that God's will for life and love will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Then truly we can sing...

Silent night, holy night, all is calm all is bright..."