

Sermon for First Sunday after Christmas

Date: December 29, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 63:7–14

Epistle Reading: Galatians 4:4–7

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:13–23

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:13-18

Sermon Title: The Herod in You

Introit: Jeremiah 31:15-17; Antiphon: Hosea 11:1

Hymns:

LSB 385 – From West to East

LSB 380 – Hark The Herald Angels Sing

LSB 370 – What Child is This (v.3)

LSB 367 – Angels from the Realms of Glory (v.4)

LSB 384 – Of the Father's Love Begotten

Distribution:

LSB 358 – From Heaven Above to Earth I Come (v. 1,7-9,13-15)

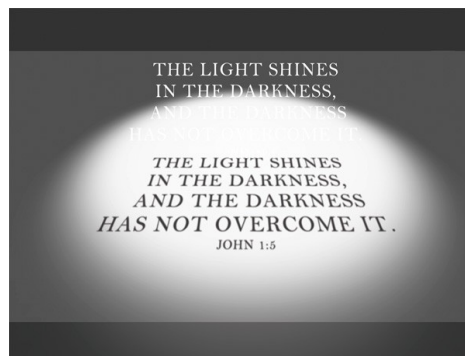
LSB 374 – Gentle Mary Laid Her Child

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Text: Matthew 2:13-18

When [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas went by this year, and the birth of Jesus went unnoticed by many just as it had that first year in Bethlehem. Know this however, that event did not go by unnoticed by Satan. When your enemy enters the battlefield in flesh and blood it is time to fight, and fight he did.

Now for this job Satan did not make a personal appearance, he very rarely does. He instead used a trusted friend, a man he could rely on, someone he had used in the past with great success, and that was good old King Herod! Historians, who lived at that time, called Herod a “monster.” He killed one of his wives, along with her grandfather, her mother, and a brother-in-law, not to mention three of his own sons. He later burned some Jewish scholars at the stake, killed two more of his own sons and also 300 people who supported those sons. All-in-all, he put to death a great number within his own family and royal court. Caesar Augustus said about him, “It is better to be Herod’s pig than his own son.” That was only because Herod wouldn’t eat pork. Here was a man Satan could rely upon!

A little while after Jesus was born, after Mary and Joseph moved out of the stable and found a place of their own; after the shepherds had come and gone; the Wise Men came from the East, and tell King Herod they are looking for “the one who has been born king of the Jews.” King Herod plays nice to these uninvited but very helpful guests, and then sends them on their way, while in his heart the plan has already been devised. Find out where the child is and kill him. There’s only enough room in this town for one king of the Jews.

When the Wise Men never return to tell him where the child is his paranoia begins to kick in. He thinks, “They want to play with Herod? They want to save the life of some meaningless child? Then I’ll kill ‘em all!” and he orders the slaughter. Every male child in the region two years old or under, get rid of them. Every one. No exceptions. After the deed is done, Herod sleeps soundly in his bed, satisfied that another threat to his reign has been put down. Unnoticed once again is the young family, now on the road to Egypt, with a baby boy, and loaded down with gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Satan failed. His enemy was still alive. The battle would have to wait for another day. So Satan continued to rage against Jesus, in the desert, in the cities, in the countryside, all the way to the cross, where Satan delightedly stood by as he watched Jesus suffer; as he watched Jesus cry out in forsakenness; as he watched his enemy in flesh and blood die. Finally die, at the hands of other trusted allies. After the deed was done, if Satan had a bed, he would have been sleeping quite

soundly in it, satisfied that another threat to his reign had been put down. However just a short time later, that tomb was empty, his enemy, his enemy in flesh and blood, his enemy that he had watched die, appeared alive in his very own house, in Hell proclaimed victory! He was not dead, but alive! Jesus was alive! Satan's enemy was alive! He had failed again.

Not one to give up, Satan continues to fight. To fight against Jesus and try to kill Him. Now since He can't kill Jesus in flesh and blood, since once you die and rise again you cannot die again, he is now out to kill Him in us. He is out to kill Christians. He is out to kill our faith. As he had found some trusted friends to help him out in the past, some people he could rely on, some folks he had used in the past with great success, so also today he uses those allies.

Who are those "monsters" of today? Pick you favorite tyrannical dictator. All of them are eager to help. They'll kill thousands in their contempt for the Christian faith and the lust for power. Certainly all of them, but there are some that hit far closer to home. A friend, who has infiltrated our defenses and whom we listen to quite readily. Who could that be? It is the sinful human nature, the little Herod, that lives in each one of us.

In your heart there is only enough room for one king, and the little Herod in you wants to be that king. You want to be in charge. You want to have the last word. You don't want to be told what to do. If another king comes along to lay claim to you, to your heart, then He's got to go.

That is the natural desire that lives in us. Don't think, even for a moment, that Satan is not using this friend to his advantage? Telling us that we'd be better off without Jesus. Convincing us that sin isn't so bad. Patting us on the back when we're more concerned about our own power, money and position than the salvation of even little children. When Holy Baptism is held in contempt, and those baptized seen as disposable expenses.

The Herod in us urges us seek our own goals and get rid of Jesus for now. He'll tell you, "you'll be forgiven anyway, Jesus will understand." That sinful nature in us purrs its consent, and wallows in those wonderful, flattering words, and says, "Yes, yes! I am in charge, I am king." While you fail to notice the smile on Satan's lips as he tiptoes away leaving you sleeping soundly in our sin.

Sleeping soundly... as over 3000 babies are still slaughtered each day in abortion. Sleeping soundly... as our friends and neighbors continue on in their unbelief. Sleeping soundly... as we go on caring more about ourselves than the

faith of children. Sleeping soundly... as we think we're doing pretty good, satisfied with ourselves.

Saint James, in Holy Scripture, tells us:

“faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Jesus said:

“Good people do the good that is in them. But evil people do the evil that is in them. The things people say come from inside them.”

Those who would sacrifice children either through abortion, or through contempt for their Baptism, faith and salvation, are equally proclaiming their own demise as the faithless “monsters” that they are.

Know this, Satan will not be victorious. Because, if you are a Christian, it is not only that little Herod, that friend of Satan, that dwells inside of you. There is, more importantly, a new creation.¹ There is one

“born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but [born] of God.”²

This one, born of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism is no friend of Satan! His presences can be seen in the works and words that come from you. Especially those you do when you think no one is watching.³

That enemy of Satan is the wise one in you who worships the Child in the manger. He is the one in you who has died to sin, and has been raised to a new life. He is the one who lives in Christ and Christ in you, and so with Christ has a heel on the devil's head!⁴ This is the one in you who is fed at the Lord's Holy Table, while the enemy drinks poison and his own condemnation.

At that Holy and Sacred Meal, eating and drinking that body and blood Satan so viciously hates! He is the one in you who knows that

“man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”⁵

That one is not in you by nature, but by the grace of God.⁶ The Father sent His Son into this world for you, and sent His Son into your heart for you, that you

1 2 Corinthians 5:17

2 John 1:13

3 James 2:17

4 Genesis 3:15

5 Matthew 4:4

6 Ephesians 2:9

might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom. By faith in the Christ, born on Christmas, crucified, but now risen and alive, you also have won the victory over Satan. And Herod, whether the wicked king of the Gospel, or the wicked one that lives in you, is unable to win or prevent the work of the Savior, for those who will feast on His Holy Word and the Holy Meal. Scripture tells us:

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.⁷

We pray for God to destroy in us all that is in conflict with Him. Destroy it in repentance. Drown it as we remember our Holy Baptism. Starve it, as we feed the new one in us with heavenly food of the Holy Sacrament. That we might live as holy and innocent. Holy not by nature, but by forgiveness. Holy in Christ.

Holy in Jesus' name. Amen.

⁷ John 1:3