

Order of Worship for December 28, 2025

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Carol: *“Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light”* – **Hymn 378**

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism: Noa Jane Ervin-Teetzen

Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:13-23

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the second chapter:

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: Now when the wisemen 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 Joseph 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.”

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Confession of Sins:

P: Lord God, we live in a world faced with all kinds of calamities—wars, loss of jobs, addictions, mental illness, cancer, disasters.

C: Evil and destruction seem to win out so much.

P: We see the innocent suffer.

C: The joy of Christmas seems like just a distraction.

ALL: We all live in the face of death. We despair and easily give in to hopelessness.

P: Our Lord Jesus is the only truly innocent one who suffered in our place on the cross to take away our sins which is the cause of all suffering. In His place and by His command I forgive You all Your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen. Jesus Christ is born!

Entrance Psalm:

P: These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

C: They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

P: In You, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame;

C: in Your righteousness deliver me.

P: For You are my rock and my fortress;

C: and for Your name's sake You lead me and guide me.

P: Into Your hand I commit my spirit;

C: You have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

C: They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Gloria Hymn: “Angels We Have Heard on High” – Hymn 368 (vs. 1)

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day:

P: Almighty God, whose praise was proclaimed in this day by the wicked death of innocent children giving us thereby a picture of the death of Your beloved Son, mortify and destroy in us all that is in conflict with You that we who have been called in faith to be Your children may in life and death bear witness to Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your son, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 31:15-17

P: Thus says the LORD: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Revelation 14:1-5

P: Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon Hymn: “*By All Your Saints in Warfare*” - **Hymn # 517, vs. 1,9,3**

Sermon: “*Why Is This Story Here?*” - **Matthew 2:13-18**

Holy Innocents—it makes for good drama to the story of Christmas and the Wisemen. Over the centuries painters have portrayed it. But it is a story only found in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew says:

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi (Wisemen), he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were 2 years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

We may picture in our minds a massacre of thousands of innocent babies—a slaughter. But there is no record in the histories of Herod to confirm it. Some scholars say it is confused with how Herod killed several of his own sons because he thought they were going to assassinate him. The great Caesar Augustus was said to have commented about Herod, “It is safer to be Herod’s pig than his son.”

So, was there a massacre in Bethlehem? We have to remember that Bethlehem was no city. It was not even an Ames. Think Kelley or Cambridge. The number of boys two years old and under may have been no more than 5-10. No wonder it was never mentioned in the histories of Herod. They have been called “Holy Innocent,” martyrs of the Church. But they were not Christians. They were boys caught in the path of Herod’s paranoia. They were no holier or innocent than the millions of children who have died a violent death. They are such a small number in comparison to the babies who have been aborted. They certainly didn’t die because they or their parents followed Jesus. So why are they even mentioned in the Bible?

The story is part of Matthew’s story about how Jesus was kept alive by God warning Joseph to flee to Egypt and by the Wisemen being told in a dream not to tell Herod when they found Jesus. But why does Matthew even tell this story of the horrible death of children?

Matthew shows us why. He spends more time telling us not about how Herod was led to kill the children, but that this all happened as a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy where Jeremiah said, “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob in the Old Testament, was buried just in view of Bethlehem. For Matthew the story of the Holy Innocents is about fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament. It helps us to see how cruel Herod was, so we see why Joseph, Mary, and Jesus needed to escape to Egypt. And going to Egypt was important so that when Herod died, Joseph could bring the family back and fulfill the words of the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt I have called My Son.” Not only that, but when Joseph came back to Bethlehem, he found out that Herod’s son Archelaus was as bad as Herod, but only

controlled the south near Bethlehem. So, Joseph left Bethlehem not for Egypt, but to return to Nazareth where he had come from originally. This fulfilled the promise of Isaiah that a shoot would come from David's family. Jesus was raised in Nazareth, which comes from the Hebrew word for "shoot." In the story of the Holy Innocents we see all the details that assure us that Jesus certainly is God's promised one.

As God, God could just snap His fingers and solve everything. He could make us sinless. But God chooses to work in us not by His power, but by His love. So, He chooses to work through real people in real history.

We see that in Jesus' life. Caesar Augustus proclaimed a census that caused Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem where Jesus was born in fulfillment of the Old Testament. He did it at just the right time when a formation of the stars and planets had the Wisemen go to Herod and then to Jesus looking for the King of the Jews. Herod's jealousy caused Jesus to go to Egypt where He could be called out of that land after Herod died. By doing that Jesus' life redoes the life of the Old Testament people of Israel who were called out of Egypt by the Exodus under Moses. But where they failed to be faithful to God, Jesus was. God later used the jealousy of the Pharisees and the priests and the fear of Pontius Pilate to get Jesus nailed to the cross.

We see God also working after Jesus ascended into heaven. When Stephen was killed the Church was scattered out of Jerusalem to spread the Gospel of Jesus to places outside of Jerusalem. God used the jealousy of Saul (who later became St. Paul) and other Jews to do this. The jealousy of the Jews led many non-Jews who regularly went to synagogues and were called "God-fearers" to convert to Christianity. He used the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Emperor Claudius to bring Jews like Aquilla and Priscilla to leave Rome and come in contact with St. Paul and be of great service to him. He used the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans to make people turn from the temple to trusting in Jesus, especially as Jesus had predicted that event. He used people like Peter, who often put his foot in his mouth, Paul, who persecuted the Church, and young Timothy to share the news of Jesus.

The same is true today. God continues to work through real people in real time. In time of disaster, Christians often come forward and help people, and that opens doors for Jesus to enter. When the tsunami hit the Indian Ocean people in Banda Achai, Indonesia, which is about 99% Moslem, invited Christians to help them rebuild. The African nation of Liberia was split by a civil war. Many Christians were forced to leave, but they fled to the neighboring country of Cote d'Ivoire and started churches there. Our friend Kebede in Ethiopia has told us that bad harvests have led to people asking him for help. Not only have they learned better farming techniques from him, they have told others among the mainly Moslem population to seek help from the Church.

God works in our lives as well. One controversy we hear of is the news about how we can't be sure that the writers of the Bible wrote what is in our Bibles. Our earliest copies of the New Testament were written 300 years after the originals. It is more like a 2000-year gap with much of the Old Testament. How can we be sure we believe in the same things that Abraham, David,

Elijah, Mary, and Peter believed? God not only inspired the writers who wrote the Scriptures, He has also made sure that the true message has been passed down through the years to you and me. God didn't stop when the words got written down. The Holy Spirit works so the truth of God can be passed down through many generations, in different languages and cultures, and into each of our hearts. Even with errors in copying the Scriptures and differences in translating it, the Word of God is still the Word of God. God also guided who copied the Scriptures, who taught it to people, who memorized it and passed it on orally from generation to generation, who used the printing press to make copies easily, as He does preachers, teachers, parents, and Bible study leaders who share it today.

And He also makes things happen in our lives. He allows our lives to be “tipped over.” Winter is here with its bitter cold. But the cold also freezes the ground. As it freezes, it expands. This causes the soil to be “worked up,” to be loosened up after it thaws for spring planting. God can use “cold” times in our lives to “loosen” them up, so that His Word can get deeper into our lives. And God makes things happen so we can in turn be the means He uses to bring Jesus into the lives of other people. Every week someone comes to this church because they heard from someone else about it. People from all over the world join us because God can use us to open His doors to Him. Just on Wednesday while we were at home celebrating Christmas, these doors were opened so that the Sudanese community could celebrate Jesus' birth together.

So why is the story of the Holy Innocents in the Bible? Because the story of Jesus is God's story, but a story worked through us humans, because in Jesus God became fully human, so that His story is our story.

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering and Voluntary

Offertory Hymn: *“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”* – **Hymn #393**

Prayers: (P: Lord in Your mercy . . . C: **Hear Our Prayer**)

Admonition to Communicants:

P: Despite the coming of Jesus on Christmas, we still live in a fallen world filled with miseries and death. Yet Jesus took the sin which has caused that fallenness and died with it on the cross and rose so that we too can rise from death when He comes again. Until that time He calls us to come to the table he sets before us of His true body and blood given to us for the forgiveness of sins. He hear his call and come to His supper.

Sanctus Hymn: *“What Child Is This?”* – **Hymn #370**

Words of the Lord:

Agnus Dei: *(sung to tune of – “Once in Royal David's City”)*

Lamb of God, the world's Redeemer,
Mercy to your people give.
Lamb of God, the world's Redeemer,
May we in Your mercy live.
Lamb of God, we all implore;
Grant us peace forevermore.

Distribution:

Communion Hymns: *“Now Sing We, Now Rejoice”* – Hymn #386

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” – Hymn #361

Song after Communion: *“Go, Tell It on the Mountain”* – Hymn #388

Prayer after Communion:

P: Almighty God, You wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature. In your mercy let us share the divine life of Jesus Christ, who came to share our humanity and who now lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

C: Amen

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen

Closing Hymn: *“Let Us All with Gladsome Voice”* – Hymn #390

Postlude: