

*The First Sunday after Christmas*  
December 29, 2013  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 2:13-23

*When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "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." After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." (NIV)*

What do you like about Christmas - the music, the decorations, the food, the presents? While I like all these things what I enjoy most of all is hearing again the account of the first Christmas from the Bible. I believe many people love the story, and that is why we see so many manger scenes to remind us of what took place that first Christmas. I looked at those scenes in our house again this week - I believe we are now up to six of them. In those mangers I found the baby Jesus with Joseph and Mary. Usually there are a few barn animals. Often there is the angel who announced the birth, and the shepherds who came to see Jesus the night of His birth. Many manger scenes even have the Magi or wise men that came sometime later and presented Jesus with gifts, from which comes our tradition of giving gifts to those we love. But in none of those manger scenes do I see the character that we find in our Gospel reading this morning. You don't see King Herod either by the manger or standing off in the distance. Nor do I believe that many of us, when telling this wonderful story to our children, include Herod and his search to kill this child or his ruthless slaughter of the little boys in and around Bethlehem.

Yet, this is very much a part of this first Christmas account. And while we celebrate Christmas, perhaps this part of this account is also important to keep in mind. When it comes to Jesus, even though the world was made through Him and He came for the world, as John's Gospel reminds us, the **"world did not recognize him"** and **"his own did not receive him."** While some of our favorite Christmas songs talk of peace on earth, perhaps this account is important to remind us that Jesus did not come to bring earthly peace.

Today, many people still have no problem with the baby Jesus, but when it comes to having Jesus as their King that is a whole other story. Many reject and refuse Jesus as their King. They do not want Jesus to rule their hearts or in any way to have control of their lives.

They ignore His Word. Like wicked Herod, they want nothing to do with this newborn King. Today, I pray the Lord leads each of us to look into our hearts for the answers to these questions: **Do we want Jesus as our King? Do we want Jesus to sit on the throne?**

It is no surprise that Herod would not want Jesus to sit on the throne. Herod breathed out murderous threats to anyone who threatened his authority. He even killed his own wife and sons. So when the Magi followed the star to Jerusalem in order to worship the “*one who has been born king of the Jews,*” it isn’t surprising to hear that Herod and all Jerusalem with him are disturbed. While Jesus did not come to be an earthly king like Herod, Herod was not taking any chances. He asked the Magi to report back to him when they found this child. But after being warned by God the Magi took another route back home and we are told “*when Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years and younger.*” Herod, giving himself some leeway when it came to the time Jesus was born in accordance with the Magi, orders the slaughter of all little boys. Historians estimate the number of boys killed ranged from 15 to 30. How terrible! Can you imagine the grief and sadness?

All this because this mad man did not want Jesus on the throne. He was selfish, angry, and greedy. He wanted things done his way. He didn’t want anything to disrupt his life, not even a Savior - especially not another king! What another example that this is a dark, dark, world of sin. How horrible that someone would slaughter lives of children who have done nothing wrong, just because he saw this child as a perceived threat and one who might change his life. How can you not read this and think of the slaughter of life that still goes on today – in the name of abortions. Many of them, not because of a perceived threat but, because having a baby may be an inconvenience. We still live in a world of people who don’t want to change their lives. This is just one example of many of sinful, selfish attitudes of people who don’t want to listen God’s Word. They don’t see a need for Jesus as their Savior. They certainly don’t want Jesus to be their King. They want to live how they want to live. They want to do what they want to do.

But before we keep pointing out the sins of others and their rejection of Jesus as Savior and King, we need to take a hard look at ourselves. We need to identify in ourselves that same sinful nature, exhibited unchecked in King Herod, which reject’s Christ’s lordship and mastery over us. We make dozens of decisions every day which either acknowledges Christ’s lordship or which assert our own. Often our actions reveal that we don’t want Jesus sitting on the throne. We don’t surrender ourselves to His Word and will. We want to do what we want to do. We want to live how we want to live. Our lives are filled with selfishness, anger, jealousy, and greed. We at times act like our own gods. Perhaps some of those sins were evident in our lives again this Christmas. We worship the baby Jesus, but then by our sins we reject Him as the King who seeks to rule our hearts and lives. This account, invites us to take a deep look into the ugliness of sin, not just in Herod, but in our own lives as well.

Yet, this account also invites us to look at the astounding grace of our God. His plan would not be thwarted by the sin of an earthly king. God would not be stopped at establishing His eternal Kingdom. In a dream, Joseph is told to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt under the darkness of night. Then, after Herod is dead, because of another dream they move into the town called Nazareth. These events, not surprisingly, also fulfilled the Scriptures. In grace (undeserved love), God would not permit anyone to harm this special child. For to us this child was born! For us this Savior was given!

This King, Jesus - the Savior, came to bring us forgiveness. He came in lowliness and to die in lowliness, which He certainly does on the cross. He came to pay for all the terrible things we have done and rise again to win us new life. He came to forgive us for our selfishness, our greed, and our determination to be our own gods. This is the kind of king Jesus is – the one who lays down His life to save ours – the King who comes in and powerfully rescues us from all our enemies – even death. He comes to be our King. This child comes not to take over our lives – He comes to give us life. Through His Word, Christ desires to reign in our hearts through faith. Through His Word, He wants to rule the throne of our hearts by giving us new hearts that love and serve Him and others.

So who do you want to be king? Who do you want to sit on the throne? A king like Herod? Ourselves? Or Christ? Who do we want to rule our hearts and lives? Yes, we could live for ourselves! We could act as our own king and try to be our own god! We could let our sinful nature reign and grab what we can for ourselves here and now in this life without letting anyone or anything else get in our way. That's what Herod did. Where did it get him in the end? The historian Josephus reports what happened at the end for Herod, that Herod *“died of ulcerated intestines, putrefied and maggot filled organs, constant convulsions, foul breath, and neither physician nor warm baths could comfort him.”* Because of his rejection of the Savior, it doesn't get any better for Herod after his earthly death.

Every year when I read the account of the first Christmas, I imagine what it would be like to be there for Jesus' birth. But if we were living in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth - think about the sadness of this account. What if we had a child, especially a son that was two or younger at that time? Imagine the horror of an earthly king taking our children from us! Keeping Herod in the Christmas story reminds us that Jesus came into the same sinful, ugly, world we live in today. This tragedy reminds us that Jesus is rejected by the world, a rejection that would one day lead to His painful death, but it highlights again the reason we needed Jesus to come – to save sinners! In this account, we witness again the undeserved love of our God who would not let evil men spoil His saving plans. Thankfully, during this earthly tragedy, God, in His grace, saved the One child you and I absolutely can't do without!

Do you want Jesus as King? Do you want Jesus on the throne or not? Carefully ask yourself this question. Then I pray the Lord will lead you to find, like me, these are really not questions at all. Jesus is already a King who is sitting on His throne! I pray that you join me in saying: *“The only king I want is Jesus. I want Jesus, the Risen Lord who sits at God's right hand, to sit on the throne of my heart! I want to follow the Magi to my Savior and worship Him and lay my gifts at His feet. I want to live in His kingdom - the only kingdom that is eternal. Jesus is the King I want to rule my life! And I want to live with Him one day in His kingdom of heaven where there will be no more sin or sadness or weeping or pain or death ever again.”* Thank God that Christmas made all of this possible! Amen.