

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
Christmas I  
26 December 2010  
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
Matthew 2:13-23

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Here we are, a day after Christmas.  
Wrapping paper still lingers in our garbage cans,  
Christmas Carols still ring in our ears,  
The warmth of the fire hasn't yet died out.

It's quiet.  
We're off work,  
Kids are out of school,  
And it's cold outside!

Yesterday was a day of great joy,  
both at home with our families,  
as well as here at Church.

But it wasn't that way for everyone.

Yes, unto us a child was born, to us a Son was given,  
Shepherds and angels and wise men all gathered around the manger in which He lay.

But while we all confessed the great Joy that this Savior brings,  
some of us confessed with tears in our eyes,  
or maybe just our hearts.

Christmas isn't easy when you're alone.  
It's not easy if you've lost someone you love dearly.  
It's not easy when family isn't nearby.  
Joy becomes something you say with your lips,  
but you know in your heart is distant.

And that's okay.

Our Joy is often masked behind great suffering.  
There are times we enter through those church doors not because we're thrilled to see  
everyone and chatter up a storm,  
but because we're hurt deeply,  
and don't know where else to go.

Death has a way of spoiling the mood,  
of pulling the rug out from under a "season of joy".

It's December 26<sup>th</sup>, the day after our Lord and Savior's birth,  
a day where Joy ought to ring freely and loudly and without any hindrance.  
And then death comes and shows its ugly, mood-killing face.

December 26<sup>th</sup> is the day the Church remembers St. Stephen.

Stephen, as you might remember from the book of Acts, is the Church's first martyr.

He's the first to die for the faith;

he's the first to shed his blood in the wake of Christ's shed blood.

Stephen's a bit of a downer,

at least for the "Christmas Spirit."

And if that wasn't enough, two days from now, December 28<sup>th</sup>, the Church remembers the slaughtering of the Holy Innocents,

Also martyrs.

There's perhaps no greater contrast to the Christmas Gospel than these two festival days.

Christmas marks the great joy of God becoming man and dwelling among us as our Redeemer and Savior.

It's the day of celebrating the Christ-Child!

God in the manger.

The Creator humbling Himself to be held by His own creation.

And then here you have hundreds of innocent children,

slaughtered *for His sake*.

They gave their lives so that Christ the babe in Mary's arm might have *His* life.

Their death meant *His* life.

Today's Gospel speaks of this horrendous tragedy—

It speaks of Herod's unquenching wrath and fury against the Christ-child.

It speaks of hundreds of children, infants, babies

being murdered on account of one King's selfish fear and pride.

Here we have Jesus,

the Joy of the World,

our coming Emmanuel,

our Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor,

Our Savior and Christ,

and, to keep you from running in the way of glory and majesty,

to keep you from expecting a Savior that would be less than He is,

He comes the way of humility and makes His first journey to Egypt.

Egypt, as you know by now from the Old Testament, is the place of death.

Egypt is where the angel of death left its all-encompassing mark on the first-born of every home—

what we now know as "the Passover."

As our Lord comes in the flesh,  
the first thing He does is go to Egypt, to death.

He here shows you what sort of Lord He is—  
even as an infant child,  
He's the one that goes to death for you.

St. Stephen and all the Holy Innocents died for the faith,  
for their Lord Jesus Christ.

But their death is only an image and picture and *response*  
to the death of their Lord *for them*.

The Holy Innocents, those children and infants of two years and under,  
gave their lives for their Lord,  
because *He* would give *His* life for them.

Yes, it would come some 30 years later,  
but the life this Christ Child would give unto death  
is the life of God in the Flesh.

The Word that became Flesh in baby Jesus,  
goes first into Egypt,  
signifying His journey into death  
walking the way of the Cross even before He learned to walk.

But as this story goes,  
our Lord does not stay in Egypt.

Indeed, He goes to Egypt,  
*in order to come out of Egypt:*  
**“This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet,  
‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’” (Mt 2:15)**

The journey into Egypt and back out  
tells us already that our Lord is the sort of Lord who travels into death,  
and rather than staying dead and buried,  
He comes back out—  
out of death and the grave  
and lives!

For those of you whose Christmas was marked by sorrow and only lip-service to Joy,  
rest assured that you're not alone.

Our Lord, even the baby Jesus,  
has you first on His mind.

*For you, He goes to Egypt.*

*For you, He walks the way of the cross.*

*For you, He sheds His blood and gives His body unto death.*

And *for you* He does not stay dead, but rises and lives:

He comes out of Egypt, *for you*.

In this, there's great Joy.

It's not in "the Christmas Spirit" or in the warmth of the fire and the smell of the fir tree.

Joy rests securely in this Jesus who gives His life *for you*.

It was with Joy that St. Stephen gave his life as a confession of faith in this Lord.

And it was with Joy, eternal Joy,

that these innocent children offered their lives for the life of this Christ child—

knowing it would ultimately be His giving *His* life for them.

His way to the Cross,

His death on the Cross,

was the defeat of Satan, evil, Herod, Egypt, and finally,

the defeat of death itself.

All of this is *for you*—

for you whose joy is veiled by suffering.

There'll be a day where that veil is removed.

When Christ comes again in glory,

taking you to be with Himself and your loved one,

with St. Stephen,

and with all the Holy Innocents.

You'll join with all the martyrs

In their joyous songs of praise,

*Glory to God in the Highest, and Peace to His people on earth. Amen.*

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*