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Christmas I
29 December 2013
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Gal 4:4-7; Mt 2:13-23

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

I. Reality of our Suffering

There are times in our lives that just don't make any sense.
When it hurts, and no amount of words can make it better;
and no matter how much you try to drink it away, it's still there when you sober up.

Like when you realize your spouse is cheating on you.
Or when your parents tell you they're getting a divorce.
Or when you lose a child, or children.

These can't be fixed.
You can't always keep the tears inside—sometimes they just don't stop.
Such was the case in Bethlehem that awful day long ago.

“Herod...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.” (Mt 2:16)

While mothers shrieked and wept; and fathers, restrained by the soldiers, were powerless,
Herod's butchers did their worst—slaying the helpless and innocent.

And why?
What could possibly justify this politically mandated infanticide?

For Herod, it was simply jealousy.
There were rumors of another king, and the Magi tricked him.
So he was ticked. That's all.

That's all it took to bring the darkness that covered Bethlehem—
just after it was so full of light—
that's all it took to fill the tiny graves.

But knowing Herod's motives won't dry the eyes of these mothers and fathers.
Knowing the mind of their demon brings no balm to their woe.
“Rachel is weeping for her children;” Jeremiah says,
“she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” (Jer 31:15; Mt 2:18)

There is no comfort for Rachel, or for these Bethlehem mothers, or for us—
apart from the Word from heaven.

We want to know *why*—
and not just the why of Herod, or Hitler, or those who pose as our enemies today—
we want to know the why from God.

II. The Heavenly Secret

Dear Heaven, share Your secret!
 Tell us why the innocent have died.
 Tell us why our pain can't be cured and our tears won't go away.
 Give us something to hope for, to believe in; *save us from our despair!*

“*Then,*” Matthew tells us—totally calm, even unscathed by his own words of this atrocity,
 “*then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.*” (Mt 2:17)

All that suffering, that pain, that anguish and torment—
 all of it was the reality seen already by the prophet of old.
 And this was its fulfillment.

Paul puts it this way:
*“But when the fullness of time had come,
 God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law,
 to redeem those who were under the law,
 so that we might receive adoption as sons.”* (Gal 4:4-5)

The coming of Christ in the flesh wasn't an accident, or plan B.
 Time—as long as it's existed, and the clocks have been ticking—
 has been creeping, or skipping, even lunging toward this Christmass event.

It wasn't arbitrary and it wasn't coincidental.
 All of it—the virgin, the stable, the manger, the angels, the shepherds, the Magi—
 all of it was what time was moving towards.

This is Heaven's answer.
 This is her secret.
 These sons of Bethlehem didn't die in vain.
 Their blood wasn't carelessly spilt, but sacrificially offered to God.
 These martyred boys of Bethlehem are part of the Christmass story.

And even though Jesus was guilty of Herod's accusation—
 being the king the Magi sought—
 His life was spared;
 while the Holy Innocent of Bethlehem—
 for whom Herod had no care—
 gave their lives for His.

They died that He might live.
 So that at the cross, though innocent of all sin, He would die, that all might live.

And these martyred boys of Bethlehem, who witnessed to the Christ by their blood,
 now pray to Him who was spared that bloody day.

Heaven's answer to our cries for mercy and explanation is the sending of Christ.
 Christmass, and with it, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Ascension and Pentecost—
 all these feasts of the Church give us the hope that our suffering is not in vain,
 for they tell us of Christ.

III. Reality of our (Future) Joy

Rachel will have her children back—her sons will dry her tears.

And so it will be for you also.
 Your suffering isn't in vain.
 Your pain isn't arbitrary or without meaning.

But there is no help for you apart from Heaven's answer.
 There's no hope apart from the sent One—Jesus the Christ.

Now *that the fullness of time has come,*
 now, that God has taken on human flesh and become like one of us,
 now, that the Prince of Peace and the Savior of our fallen race has come among us,
 even, dwelt among us,
we are no longer slaves, but sons;
and if sons, then heirs through God.

And if we're sons and heirs, then let us not be slaves any longer.
 Not to our fear, pain, anger, or bitterness.
 Not to sin, or thinking that God is angry with us.
 Not to our schedules, our iPhones, our games, our sports;
 not to our horoscopes, our facebook status updates, or twitter feeds;
 not to our late night drinks, to our pot, or to our medications.
 Let us not be slaves to any of the things that dragged us down and away from God.

But as sons, as heirs, as those spared by the blood of this Christ,
 let us rejoice that in the fullness of time Christ has done all for us.

We are free—
 free like those Holy Innocent martyred long ago;
 free like Rachel, whose weeping has come to an end;
 free like those who have seen a great light, and upon whom the light has come.

Christ is born, all is done, we are His, and He is ours.
 Merry Christ-Mass!

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