

1st Sunday after Christmas
December 29, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Christmas Peace Cannot Be Broken

Matthew 2:13–15, 19-23 (NIV84)

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.”¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt²⁰ 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.”²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.²² 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,²³ 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.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

On December 24, 1914 a group of German soldiers sang Silent Night, in German of course. The English soldiers in the other trench responded by singing Silent Night in English. And the next day, Christmas Day, along the Western Front, groups of soldiers met in no man’s land to wish each other a Merry Christmas. Gifts of chocolate, sausages and plum pudding were exchanged instead of gunfire. Smiles and handshakes and goodwill were exchanged instead of anger, hatred and death. But this peace was not for everyone along the Western Front in WWI. Others continued to fight on that Christmas Day. This peace was not long lived. Most went back to the trenches and began to fight each other again on December 26th. And for the rest of that terrible war, there would not be another Christmas Day like that. The guns would continue to fire until the end of the war.

So it is with all peace that depends upon humans to keep. Peace will never last long in this world with so many who want power and control, with those who want to be kings. We meet two such kings in our account from Matthew 2 today. They only want peace for themselves, even if it breaks peace for others. We might also see ourselves as little kings who by our sin breaks peace in our own lives and in the lives of others. But God teaches us today that Christmas Peace Cannot Be Broken. Not by the Herods of this world and not by us.

Not By the Herods of this World

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.”

This was standard operating procedure for Herod the Great. Though he was not technically a Jew, he

was the King of the Jews. Therefore, he felt that he had the right to kill anyone who might try to rebel against him, even his own children. So when the Magi tell Herod that they are going to look for the newborn King of the Jews, Herod already knows what to do. It is nothing for him to kill a young child to prevent rebellion in the future.

But the Child Herod wants to eliminate is the Anointed One. We sang in Psalm 2 this morning what the Lord thinks of the plans of those who oppose his Anointed One. “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One....The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.” God laughs at the kings of this earth. They think they are in control. They think they have all the power. Herod thinks he can remain King of the Jews by killing Jesus. But Herod cannot break the peace Christ was born to give. Herod cannot stop Christ, the Anointed One, from accomplishing his mission of bringing about peace between God and sinful humans.

Certainly Herod succeeds in breaking up some of the peace Mary and Joseph were enjoying with Mary’s young son. At this point Jesus would have been somewhere between six months old, up to two years old. Mary and Joseph had remained in Bethlehem after that first Christmas. They had moved from the place Jesus was born and now lived in a house. The shepherds had visited the night of Christ’s birth after the angels appeared to them. They had taken Jesus on his first journey to Jerusalem, just a couple of hours away, when they brought him to the temple. There Simeon and Anna praised the Lord for seeing their Savior. And the Magi arrived with precious gifts for the Christ-Child. Things were going well for Mary and Joseph and young Jesus. But their earthly peace is broken by Herod’s hatred and God sends Joseph a message to flee to Egypt.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,¹⁵ 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.”

What a disruption of life! Moving is never fun, at least for me. But being forced to flee in the middle of the night with a very young child would be quite scary. Nothing peaceful about it. Yet, Matthew reminds us that though Herod planned to kill Jesus, God had other plans. God was in control, not Herod. God planned to call his Son out of Egypt just as he had called the children of Israel out of Egypt at the time of Moses. Though Herod broke up the peace of Mary and Joseph living in Bethlehem, God’s plan to bring the peace of forgiveness was going just as he planned.

Herod’s time of disrupting peace would come to an end, probably months after Mary and Joseph arrived in Egypt.

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt²⁰ 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.”²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

As a side note for you historians today, Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., that is, 4 years Before Christ. Of course, that cannot be since Christ was born before Herod died. Early Christians who set up our

modern system of counting the years simply made a mistake in determining the year of Christ's birth. So Jesus was actually born a little before 4 B.C.

In that year of 4 B.C. Joseph and Mary and Jesus began to make their way back to Israel. Things are looking up. Maybe they will be able to raise Jesus in peace now that Herod is dead. But the forces of evil opposed to God's plan continue to attempt to break the peace.

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,²³ 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."

Instead of moving back to Bethlehem or staying near Jerusalem, Joseph returns to Nazareth in Galilee. Another disruption because of an earthly king but again the Lord laughs because he had always intended for Jesus to be from Nazareth. God's plan to bring true peace to sinners cannot be broken.

The Lord did not have this particular prophecy recorded for us in the Old Testament. Perhaps it was something passed along by oral tradition. But the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to record this for us so that we would know whose plans were truly being carried out. Herod and his son looked like the powers in Judea but God was always in control as he brought his Anointed One into this world to bring us peace.

Not By Us

Christmas peace cannot be broken by earthly kings or by our own attempts to rule our lives. We must admit that we can be the worst enemies of peace in our own lives. Our jealousy ruins peace between friends. Our anger ruins peace within the family. Our sins make a real mess of things. We may even think we have ruined our peace with God. Maybe God will take back the forgiveness of sins won by Christ because we were so foolish. Maybe God will take back his gift of a Savior born for us because we no longer deserve it. Maybe we've sinned one too many times, repeated the same foolish evil again and again, and run out of second chances. Maybe we have ruined Christmas peace.

When we think that we have in some way ruined the peace that Jesus has achieved for us, we are really thinking too highly of ourselves. I know, it seems that we are looking down on ourselves. But really, we are saying that we are more powerful than Herod the Great. He couldn't stop Jesus from bringing the peace of forgiveness through his life and death for sinners. Neither can we. Christmas peace, forgiveness and life eternal are yours. The devil tried with all his might to destroy the work of Christ in bringing peace between God and man. The devil could stop Christmas peace. Neither can we. Your sins are not counted against you because the Prince of Peace paid for every sin. You cannot stop Jesus and the peace he brings to you.

The Christmas truce in 1914 only lasted a day or so until the peace was broken again by war and death. But the peace of Christ's forgiveness continues day after day for all sinners who trust in the Son of God born of Mary. One day perfect and total peace will be ours in heaven. That peace will never be broken.

Amen.