
We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now when they 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 he 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.*" (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

We have heard about King Herod (called "The Great") a few times within the last month.

Thirty years prior, Herod had secured his power through craftiness, following in the path of his father.

But the plague of coming to power that way is that you are constantly burdened with the insecurity that someone else is plotting to do the same thing to you.

Thus in our text, we hear of Herod's scheme to try to secure his throne and title

as the "**King of the Jews**" (which was bestowed upon him by Rome) from the Christ-child.

At first his tactic was to fool the unsuspecting wise men into telling him precisely where Jesus was so that he could make a surgical attack and kill only the boy... perhaps his family, too.

But when the wise men didn't return with the boy's location,

it seemed acceptable to deploy his soldiers against all the boys 2 years and younger in and around Bethlehem to murder them, in hopes that one of them was "**the one born King of the Jews.**"

To boil it down, Herod was looking for security, and this was his crafty attempt at keeping it.

And in one sense, it would seem that he got a certain feeling of security,

because after this slaughter, it seems he was no longer concerned about the situation anymore.

(In reality, he didn't have much time left for that concern anyway,

as his life was coming to a horrible end with numerous putrid medical ailments.)

...

Like all of us, Herod wanted security. But, sadly, he was willing to get it at any cost.

He didn't hold himself to any recognizable code of ethics or morality, let alone God's holy Word.

He lied to the wise men, seeking to use these foreign dignitaries for his dirty work.

He schemed against the Jewish hope of the Christ, by plotting to kill Him.

And he murdered the innocent boys of Bethlehem, none of whom were "**the king of the Jews.**"

And all that for the feeling of security... a false security though it was.

This is a great lesson for us to take in during these turbulent years as things seem to be spiraling out of our control more and more quickly.

Last year is now behind us, but all the issues that plagued us on Dec. 31st, didn't disappear Jan. 1st.

There are so many uncertainties and insecurities ahead of us, aren't there?

Like King Herod, we are easily tempted to obsess over securing what we have,

our money, our health, our reputation, our jobs, and so on.

And so we plan and put things in place to secure them: we insure them, we put them in safes, we take vitamins & supplements and isolate ourselves, we get Life Lock and Norton Antivirus.

And there is nothing inherently wrong with these things, in and of themselves.

We desire to be good stewards, or managers, of what God has given us.

In our days, these are reasonable and, sadly, ordinary precautions.

...But then, do we relax and commend them into God's hands?

Don't we, more often, still worry about them and fear their loss?

And when our plans fall through, when the robber has stolen, the moth has destroyed, the insurance company doesn't pay out, the gov't fails to uphold its promises, and the doctors cannot help any longer...

then our world comes crashing down, our life is miserable, and we want to give up.

Then we see that we have been trying to serve two masters, God and ourselves.

We are happy to believe that we trust God for all our good, and give Him credit for His blessings, but then it is our job to secure them and make sure that they stay ours.

Yes, He protects us, but when life gets difficult, when tragedy strikes, then it seems that God is not holding up His end of the bargain anymore, not doing what we think He should be doing.

Then we find to what extent we have begun to trust in ourselves, as we turn to ourselves to fix it.

And so our obsession with security begins to show itself for what it really is: fear.

Fear of not having power to control the situations in our lives, let alone your life itself.

Fear that your life won't be as ideal or free from difficulties as you have been planning it out to be.

Fear that your plans will fall through.

And that is where we see our attempts to serve two masters fail.

The life that was given to you, the plans that you make, are for whom?

For the Lord who gave you your life, your body and soul, and all that you have?

Are you securing His things for Him, as good managers of His possessions?

Or are you trying to secure them for yourself, so that you won't be disadvantaged?

Do you understand what you say when you pray, "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?**"

...

Those children who died in Herod's massacre were the Lord's.

Not just because He created them, and not just because He would redeem them by Jesus' blood, but also because He had declared them to be in His family through circumcision on the 8th day.

He had already cut off the old Adam in them, circumcising their hearts, declaring them to holy through their connection with Christ and His circumcision.

Their deaths, though a tragedy to their parents and community, were their door into paradise.

So while the world would see that the Lord had left them unprotected and insecure, we recognize that the Lord had already secured the certainty of their salvation for them.

And having done so, He then used them as a screen to secure Jesus' flight into Egypt, where He stayed until Herod's death.

While Herod serves as a good lesson for us of the temptations of our flesh to selfishly secure

God's good gifts for ourselves, Joseph serves as a godly example of the trust the Lord would grant us.

Life would now seem to be very insecure for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

Who would have ever guessed that King Herod would be threatened by this infant child?

They had to flee for Jesus' life that very night to the foreign land of Egypt.

And what did they have to afford such a trip and stay? They hadn't stockpiled supplies or cash.

Very probably the only resources they had for such a trip were the gifts that the wise men had so recently bestowed upon Jesus: the gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

What do you suppose this did for Joseph's career plans?

Or the investment strategies he was planning out for those recently acquired gifts.

Or Mary's hopes of establishing a happy home in Bethlehem?

But we see an unwavering spirit in Joseph as he forsakes all his temporal hopes and dreams in order to serve his Lord and protect the ones entrusted to his care with the resources God had provided for that very purpose.

Notice how St. Matthew records Joseph's obedience:

The angel tells him: **Rise! Take the Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and remain there...**

And so **he rose...took the Child and His mother by night & departed to Egypt and remained there...**

There was no hesitation, no wrestling with God's Word from the angel. Just obedience.

Joseph didn't know what to expect in Egypt or on the way there.

He didn't know how long they would be gone, just until Herod's death, whenever that happened.

He didn't know how comfortable they would be while they were there.

But he was secure knowing that this was the Father's will, for him, for Mary, and for Jesus.

Though Joseph most likely didn't recognize it at the time, or even after,

St. Matthew makes it clear that these incidents were not random or out of God's control.

Instead, as St. Matthew quotes the OT prophets 3 times in our text,

we see that the Lord had planned it... This is how He chose to protect Jesus in His infancy.

...Not at the expense of those Bethlehem boys, but for their salvation.

...Not by the supernatural power of angels defending Jesus against Herod's soldiers, but by having an angel announce the attempted destruction of Jesus, and having Joseph and his family flee to Egypt by night.

As children of God, the same thing that protected Joseph and Mary and Jesus, is the same thing that protects you: God's Word,

as Hebrews 1:3 says, **He upholds the universe by the Word of His power.**

And so, He upholds you and secures you by the **Word of His power.**

First, in holy absolution and the declaration of your sins forgiven through Jesus.

Then in the preservation and protection that He ordains for your earthly life.

God's Word does not promise you a life of medical, financial, social, or other worldly kinds of security.

In fact, He says in our Epistle^(1Peter4:12)that, bearing the name of Christ, you should expect the opposite:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

While you can expect **fiery trials**, that does not mean that you are without security.
You have the certainty of your salvation, given you through your Baptism into Christ,
where your fears and insecurities were washed away in Christ's blood
and you are named God's child.

...

There are worse things than earthly death after all... such as Herod's death.

Not just his painful earthly death, but also now his eternal death, suffering that he is enduring
because he would not humble himself before the real "**King of the Jews**,"
but instead tried to secure his own earthly, and very temporary, kingdom by sin.

There are worse things than earthly death.

In fact, for the Christian, there are few things better than the blessed death of the saints in Jesus
as it releases you from every insecurity that would steal your comfort in Christ,
every sin that entangles your heart with the cares and concerns of this life, and
every guilt that burdens your conscience and causes you fear before the "**King of the Jews**."

In having Joseph flee with his family, the Lord was protecting and securing your redemption for you.
He was saving that precious child for the right time & place & circumstance so that all of Scripture
could be fulfilled, the Prophets as well as the Law, in the person and perfect life of Jesus Christ.
His official title "**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**" was eventually restored to Him by Rome,
as He hung under it on the cross.

In great suffering, your Savior secured for you the certainty of your salvation.

You are free then to do as Luther recommends in his daily prayers,
commending yourself to God, your body and soul, and all things, for His holy purposes,
trusting Him that your salvation is certain & **all things work for the good of those who love Him.**

And He will send *His holy angels to be with you, that the wicked foe may have no power over you.*

Just as He, through Christ, *protects you from sin and every evil.*

*Glory be to God in the Highest,
and on earth, Peace,
Good will toward men.*

Soli Deo Gloria