

Matthew 2:13-23

It's the second day of Christmas. If you have a true love, then you should have a pair of turtledoves and a couple of partridges in pear trees in your possession, with a lot more to come. But chances are that you stopped opening presents yesterday, and you did not unwrap a bird of any kind. Christmas is over...according to the world around us. Trees are already being taken down. Radio stations are back to playing their normal fare. Shoppers are lining up to make returns and exchanges. Tomorrow Wall Street will be back in high gear, people will head off to work; they will get on with their lives, at least until New Year's Eve--one last "Hurrah!" before the long months of winter set in.

But in the church, Christmas is not over until Epiphany comes January 6th. And in a very real sense, Christmas is never over, because Christ is born within us again and again as we hear His words and receive His Sacraments. And this is good, for we need Christmas...we need Christ, Immanuel: God with us, not just once a year, but day after day throughout our lives. Because we live in a world of sin and death, a world of greed, hatred, quarreling, and selfishness. And we ourselves are part of the problem. Yet Christmas means that God gives us the solution in His Son, Jesus. And He makes life worth living not just at Christmastime, but throughout the year.

Yesterday the Christmas Gospel was Luke 2, the happy story of Mary and Joseph, angels, and shepherds. No sadness there, no tears, no sorrow; only joy and wonderment. The most negative part of the entire story is that Mary and Joseph could not get a room in the Inn but had to stay out in the stable. Today St. Matthew tells us a very different story. The story of what took place after Jesus was born. Wise Men come from the East to worship Him. That's happy. But then we see King Herod lying to them with evil intentions in his heart. We hear about warnings being given...God warning the Wise Men to avoid Herod and go home by another way, and God warning Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt.

And then we see it...the tears flowing, unstoppable, the crying, the wailing. Matthew tells it just how it happened. Herod's soldiers murdering in cold blood all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem. Bethlehem! The little town we sing about with joy on Christmas Eve now is grieving in sorrow, for the blood of her children is running through her streets; the very streets the shepherds ran through with excitement after kneeling before the Infant Jesus.

Christmas isn't supposed to be like that we think. Not blood and tears, not murder and sorrow. It's a happy time. A time for parents to watch the joy on the faces of their children; not a time for burying those little faces in a grave. It's a time for rejoicing, not grieving. A time for spreading good cheer, not the dreadful news of a terrorist king on a rampage. But there is no way around it. The story is true, and St. Matthew does not, in any way, sugarcoat it for us. But friends, we desperately need this story. It is not a story to avoid, but one to embrace...and here's why. The story of Christmas as Luke tells it makes us happy, but Matthew's Christmas story gives us real joy. Yes, joy. Joy amid all the sadness and death.

It's so easy for us to believe that when Jesus was born, everything was wonderful. Every face wore a smile. Every marriage was perfect. Every child always obeyed his parents. Every parent was always wonderful and loving toward their children. There was no anger anywhere, no hatred. No one was sad; every heart was happy on that first Christmas. With his Christmas story, St. Matthew holds up his hand to us and says, "Wait a minute...that's not at all how life was!" The day Jesus was born was just another ordinary day. A day when husbands and wives were bickering, children were complaining, people were sick and many were dying. There was anger and hatred within the hearts of

many. Some people were drunk. Some were full of despair. There were crimes being committed, and there were murders taking place--even the murdering of little baby boys. This is the world at the time of the first Christmas. This is the world into which Jesus was born.

And this is our world today. Not a happy world; a world filled with stress and anxiety. A world full of selfishness. A world troubled about money, divorce, car accidents, tension in North Korea, terrorist plots against normal citizens. A world that is dying. If you think Jesus came only for happy people...think again. If you think He came for families who are well-adjusted, who are successful in every venture, who do not know the meaning of worry and money problems...think again. If you think Jesus came for people who are living right before God, who always have a positive attitude, who are never afraid and who shed few tears...think again.

Jesus was born for the little orphan who wishes he had a family. He was born for the child whose father comes home drunk every night. He was born for the woman living with depression, for the man who just lost his job and cannot afford Christmas presents for his family. Jesus was born for those who are deaf and have never heard a Christmas carol. He was born for those who are starving in various parts of the world. He was born for the parents who lost their child in death; for the widow, the widower. Christmas is not about us stepping out of our troubled little worlds and entering into God's perfect world. Christmas is God stepping out of His perfect world and entering into our troubled worlds.

If you have no problems in life, then Matthew's Christmas story is not for you. If you do not ever deal with sickness, sorrow, and death, then you will not relate to Matthew's Christmas story. But if you know what it's like to be lonely; if you have ever faced, or are facing, death among those you love; if you have struggles in your marriage, struggles within your family, if you struggle with alcohol, or gambling, or pornography, if you struggle with guilt over sins in your past, then Matthew's Christmas story is for you. You have a Savior who knows what you are going through. He knows all about suffering, hatred, sickness, and death. He knows about loneliness, and depression, and guilt. This is the world He was born into. Jesus was not born into a perfect world at a perfect time. He was born into our dying world because, friend, He was born to die for you. To take your problems, your guilt, your sickness, your depression, your sins, your death upon Himself to a place called Golgotha.

He did this for you whether you have large problems or small ones; whether you are healthy or very sick; whether you are happy today or full of sadness. He did this...He died for you, and so no matter who you are; no matter how sinful, how awful, how selfish and guilty you are, you are forgiven. God forgives you right now, today, because Jesus was born to die for you.

Take this story...Matthew's Christmas story home with you. Take it to heart. It's full of sadness, yes. But it's also full of joy. Joy for you. Because no matter who you are, no matter what your world is like--you, friend, have a Savior. Amen.