



## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SUNDAY DECEMBER 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2019

**“NO MORE HERODS”!**



The Destruction of Aleppo, Syria,

Today we celebrate the second Sunday of the Christmas season. Luke's account of Jesus' birth last week, Christmas Day, was sunny, bright, awash with hope, as he declared the true bringer of peace, Jesus, *not* the Emperor of Rome, Augustus Caesar. Luke's story on Christmas morning, was a theophany, the supreme appearance of God to human beings, replete with angels and even compliant, rustic, ruffian shepherds. Little wonder that the Christmas Story has been idealized and romanticized. But now the Christmas crowds have gone and today, we hear Matthew's version of the Christmas Story: and how totally different it is. Consistent with Luke, we hear of God's coming among us as a vulnerable child, God in diapers, *God for us, but what is different is the already gathering resistance of the political social and religious apparatus, personified in Herod. In Matthew God comes among us in a world where children die, where children are killed.* It is a world where innocents are massacred, where even the Holy Family become asylum seekers, with a “well-founded fear of persecution”, as the Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol, so neatly but chillingly puts it. There is however a curious and intriguing point in Matthew's story. It is this: that while the religious insiders, the Jewish children of the Exodus, respond with hostility, to Jesus the Saviour and Liberator, the outsiders, the pagans, the unbelievers, the Zoroastrian philosophers, the Magi from distant Persia (Iran), carry an intuition about this Jesus, which is more right than wrong.

## GATHERING

### Welcome

In the name of God our Father and Mother  
 In the name of the Son  
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with  
*And also with you*

**HYMN: Christians awake (TiS 306, Yorkshire - Stockport, John Byron)**

### We light the Christ Candle

#### First Reader

During Advent and on Christmas Day, we lit the candles for hope, for peace, for joy and for love. Today we light the Christ candle alone: the Christ who evokes all of these dimensions so necessary for living.

#### Second Reader

Unwelcomed child, seeker of asylum, refugee;  
*We welcome you*

#### First Reader

Teacher, healer and protagonist;  
*We welcome you*

#### Second Reader

Lover of the unlovable,  
 Toucher of the untouchable,  
 Forgiver of the unforgivable;  
*We welcome you*

#### First Reader:

Loved by women, feared by men,  
 Befriended by the weak despised by the strong,  
 Deserted by his listeners, betrayed by his friends,  
 Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh;  
*We welcome you.*

## The Peace

### LET'S HEAR THE WORD

#### Isaiah 63:7-9 (The Message)

Jenny Huckson

This is what is called by scholars a motivational clause. On the face of it, it appears to be a passage that celebrates a joyous return from exile to the homeland of Jerusalem. But that is not its purpose. Rather, it precedes a long lament about the failure of God's people but more so, it is about God's silence in the face of all of this. Today's reading is designed to motivate God to return as Rescuer. The word for gracious dealings is the Hebrew *chesed* which refers to God's loving loyalty established generations before with Abraham and Moses. The question is: will not you God remain loyal to us and free us from this exile in Babylon?

7-9 I'll make a list of GOD's gracious dealings,  
 all the things GOD has done that need praising,  
 All the generous bounties of GOD,  
 his great goodness to the family of Israel—  
 Compassion lavished,  
 love extravagant.  
 He said, "Without question these are my people,  
 children who would never betray me."  
 So he became their Saviour.  
 In all their troubles,  
 he was troubled, too.  
 He didn't send someone else to help them.  
 He did it himself, in person.  
 Out of his own love and pity  
 he redeemed them.  
 He rescued them and carried them along  
 for a long, long time.

The word of the Lord

***Thanks be to God***

#### Psalm 148 (New Revised Standard Version - NRSV) Jenny Huckson

Psalm 148 is often recalled as one that is central to St Francis of Assisi and the radical Franciscan movement, founded in 1209, with its emphasis upon respect for the creation. It is another of the five psalms (Pss 146-150) which together form a concluding doxology to the Book of Psalms. Each begins and ends with the word *hallelujah* 'praise the Lord'. Praise is the central concern of these psalms and the very response they seek to evoke. The five psalms call upon individuals, Israel and Judah, the heavens and earth, faithful people, and

'everything that has breath' (Ps 150:6) to praise the Lord. All creation praises. This psalm is, therefore, appropriate for the feast of Christmas when joy overwhelms God's people.

Psalm 148 falls into two main parts, vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-13b. In these sections the heavens and the earth, respectively, are called on to give praise, as if we have two choirs responding to each other in antiphonal fashion. The psalm then concludes with vv. 13c-14.

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

<sup>2</sup>***Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!***

<sup>3</sup>Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

<sup>4</sup>***Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!***

<sup>5</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.

<sup>6</sup>***He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.***

<sup>7</sup>Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

<sup>8</sup>***fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!***

<sup>9</sup>Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

<sup>10</sup>***Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!***

<sup>11</sup>Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

<sup>12</sup>***Young men and women alike, old and young together!***

<sup>13</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

<sup>14</sup>***He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!***

## Hebrews 2:10-18

We often think of divinity and humanity as absolute opposites, opaque to each other. The author of Hebrews however explains to us, how they are connected through Jesus Christ. He begins the reading with the idea of God making of the Son a pioneer (*archegos*) In 2:10 he draws the hearers' attention to why this was so fitting or beneficial. For it meant that he became like us. At one level this act of solidarity was one of leadership. He joined us so that he could lead us along the pathway to God, the goal of the journey. That is probably the main focus of the statement here about perfecting. It has less to do with moral improvement than it has to do with bringing someone to the goal of their journey. God brought Jesus to the goal of his journey and in doing so made him the pioneer or leader of all other human beings, who can also be called God's children, although in a different sense than Christ is, according to the author.

<sup>10</sup>It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. <sup>11</sup>For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, <sup>12</sup>saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." <sup>13</sup>And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me."

<sup>14</sup>Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup>and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. <sup>16</sup>For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. <sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

## A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-23      John Huckson

**This reading is full of allusions and memory. We not only have the recollection in the Hebrew Bible, of Israel going down into Egypt and being called up out of Egypt in the Exodus, but we also have echoes of the attempt of the Pharaoh to kill Hebrew infants which led to Moses being set among the bulrushes. One way to help people escape the romanticism and nonsense of Christmas is to help them see what kind of a story this is and how it works. It is saying in its distinctive way: history is repeating itself: just as the Exodus event with the escape of Moses, so with the birth and life of Jesus**

In a very real sense, stories such as these, invite us to play them over again in our own territory. To the sensitive imagination the threatened ruler absurdly massacring the helpless, has allusions to events in our own age. Matthew, is, after all not telling us about the baby and not just telling us about past history, but also reflecting the pain which his own community has faced. This pain belongs in the Christmas season if Christ is not to be trivialised. We have our own stories of infants stolen from their families – the history of ‘the stolen generation’ of indigenous children. We also have the story today of very young innocent children stranded in Syria, being refused repatriation by their own nations, because of their problematic historical links with Islamic fundamentalists: stateless children with no protection under international law. Complex as these questions are, our reading today should at least cause some discomfort to us.

<sup>13</sup> After the scholars were gone, God’s angel showed up again in Joseph’s dream and commanded, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child, and wants to kill him.”

<sup>14-15</sup> Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod’s death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached: “I called my son out of Egypt.”

<sup>16-18</sup> Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he’d gotten from the scholars.) That’s when Jeremiah’s sermon was fulfilled:

A sound was heard in Ramah,  
 weeping and much lament.  
 Rachel weeping for her children,  
 Rachel refusing all solace,  
 Her children gone,  
 dead and buried.

<sup>19-20</sup> Later, when Herod died, God’s angel appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt: “Up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel. All those out to murder the child are dead.”

<sup>21-23</sup> Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and re-entered Israel. When he heard, though, that Archelaus had succeeded his father, Herod, as king in Judea, he was afraid to go there. But then Joseph was directed in a dream to go to the hills of Galilee. On arrival,

he settled in the village of Nazareth. This move was a fulfillment of the prophetic words, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

The Gospel of the Lord

***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**Hymn: The Virgin Mary (TiS 307, The Virgin Mary, Anon Caribbean)**

**A Clip: “A Force More Powerful”**

**Some thoughts...**

**Let’s Give: Summing Up the Work of Act for Peace and the Christmas Bowl in Australia.**

**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below,  
praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of the People**

**Jeremy Kim**

Today we remain especially mindful of Christmas morning when we affirmed that the vocation to become human is a high one – to be divine. This vocation however also makes us sharply aware of our failings, both individual and collective. The themes today, remind us of the way in which attempting to realize our potential divinity as human beings and Christians is also quite dangerous. Today, the one offers prayers will conclude each petition with the words, “*Help us to become divine*” and the response, “*Never giving up*”.

Let us pray together:

***Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your Kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin***

*하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여  
이름이 거룩히 여김을  
받으시옵며  
나라이 임하옵시며  
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것같이  
땅에서도 이루어지이다.  
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을  
주옵시고*



**against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom,  
the power and the glory are yours.  
Now and for ever.  
Amen.**

우리가 우리에게 죄 지은 자를  
사하여 준 것같이  
우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고  
우리를 시험에 들게 하지  
마옵시고  
다만 악에서 구하옵소서  
대개 나라와 권세와 영광이  
아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다.  
아멘

**Hymn; Joy to the World, Vs 1&2 (TIS 268, Antioch, Isaac Watts)**

### **Blessing**

You have come to us as a small child,  
but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,  
the gift of love eternal  
Caress us with Your tiny hands,  
embrace us with Your tiny arms  
and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.

**Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

***In the name of Christ***

***Amen***

**Closing Verse: Joy to the World, Vs 3 (TIS 268) ... He rules the world.....**

**Postlude**

**Organist:**

John Hughes