**Matthew 2:13-23 December 29, 2019**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 2nd chapter here re-reading these words. “Now when they (meaning the magi or wise men) 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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The presents have been opened. The meals have been eaten. And whether you can believe it or not, Christmas is over. A trip to any major retail store will remind you of that in a hurry. From the shelves of Christmas wrapping paper, Christmas decorations and Christmas lights that now have a clearance sticker on them, to the long lines at the customer service desk, of people returning items, it seems Christmas has come and gone. It doesn’t take long does it? Before Christmas is here there is that anticipation of its coming, there is the waiting, and preparing, and the seemingly never ending list of everything that must be done before the big day. But once Christmas ends, it’s back to business as usual. In the eyes of our culture, Christmas ends once December 26th has arrived. And as far as the Nativity story, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ when it comes to Christmas, in the eyes of our world, well the movie might as well fade to black on that night in Bethlehem. The story of Christmas ends in the minds of many with baby Jesus sleeping in the hay, the shepherds spreading the Word, and the star gleaming down on the Holy Family, nestled and comfortable amid the animals on that beautiful Christmas Night…You can almost hear the words “And they lived happily ever after” or an orchestra playing a grand finale as “The End” come up on the screen as this peaceful scene comes to a close.

Well, I’m here this morning to bring you the rest of the story. I’m here to follow up the narrative of baby Jesus in the manger with the “Sequel” to Christmas so to speak. Too often we focus only on Christ’s birth that Christmas morning, and fail to see the events that take place after The Son of God has come into this world. And I’m not making reference to the wise men, Epiphany will be our moment of reflection on the work of these wise men from the east who came bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, come back next week to hear about them. What we are focused on this morning, is what you really could consider, the dark side of the Christmas story. This is a scene that you will not see on any Christmas cards, and depicted in any nativity scenes.

After the wise men leave Mary and Joseph, and after Jesus has grown from the suckling babe in a manger to an infant and older child living in a house, an angel appears to them again, telling them of the journey that they must make to Egypt. Any knowledge of the geographical area of Israel, and you will know that this was not a simple request. They would not be jumping into a carriage and comfortably traveling on the highway, arriving in Egypt refreshed in a few days. This was going to be a long and strenuous journey, where they would need supplies. God had provided for them in the gifts that they had received from the magi, but the one thing they really needed, was time, and the angel came to tell them that time was not on their side. The angel brings Joseph a message with very clear instructions. He imperatively commands Joseph to “Rise, take Mary and Jesus, and **flee** to Egypt”. This is military language that the angel is using with the Holy Family and it shows the severe situation that they are in. Gone is the comfort and peace that Jesus was sleeping in on that Christmas morning. If this is the sequel to the first Christmas scene that we see, this one is very different, and it comes with a strict warning. Because they are fleeing from a King who wants to “search for the child, to **destroy** him.”

The scene of Mary and Joseph, panicking and fumbling to pack up and flee into the night is one I haven’t seen on too many Christmas cards that I have received. And certainly, the reason for their fleeing is often not spoken of when we look at the secular happiness of Christmas. Mary and Joseph escape the wrath of a paranoid and evil King; King Herod, who then orders the massacre of all the boys of Bethlehem ages 2 and under. This is a scene of unspeakable evil and sadness, where children are ripped from the arms of their parents and killed. It leaves a sad and sour taste in the mouth of anyone still celebrating Christmas, and it is a very sobering reality to the evil that existed in the world at the time of Jesus’ birth, to think that a man would be capable of destroying one child, to keep his throne is heinous enough, but to think that He would knowingly order the death of innocents just to keep his power, shows the depth of his fear and his hate. It shows the depth of sin and evil, and sadly sin and evil still exist in our world today. We too, live in evil times, when children are still being killed, not at the orders of a ruthless and paranoid King, but at the convenience of their parents who do not wish to have them. We live in evil times, where people take their own lives in senseless ways, giving in to despair and hopelessness. We live in a world of felons and criminals who commit heinous atrocities, that are not even able to be spoken of in public places. A time of persecution, where even just a few short days ago on Christmas, 11 Christians were killed in Nigeria. This scene of Herod ordering the death of children is one that is never put on any Christmas cards, but it is the greatest evidence of sin in our world.

Yet, in the midst of the tragedy of the slaughter of the innocents, there is hope. And whether we can see it or not, there is life, and there is God’s grace and provision. Because the Son of God, escaped the massacre of a maniacal king. Against all odds, Jesus makes it out of this horrific slaughter. But this is a story that does not have a Hollywood ending. Again, if the nativity is the first scene of Christmas and here we see the dark sequel of the events in Bethlehem, then it would make sense that in the third installment, Jesus would come back, a grown man, riding in to victory on a warhorse, slaying the Romans for the atrocities that were committed in Bethlehem, and avenging the death of so many innocents. It would be something straight out of an action film, with Jesus raising up all the people in full revolt against the established government and returning the Jews to their rightful place of power. But that’s not what happens. Jesus flees from the wrath of Herod and eventually resides in lowly Nazareth. He grows, is baptized, lives his life, and eventually, in a moment that can only be described as unfathomable love, He gives himself up to death for all of mankind. Let that sink in for a moment. Stop and think about what that means. We would expect Jesus to return in vengeance, killing Herod’s descendants and anyone connected to this terrible and evil act. But instead, He grows up into a man, in order that He would die. He lives his life, to die on the cross, to save all of mankind from their sins. In that moment when Jesus willingly gives up his life on the cross, He is doing so for you, for me, for his mother, for his father, for all of the wailing mothers of Bethlehem, for all of the slain innocents, and even for Herod, and the soldiers, and the Jewish leaders who sought to crucify him in the first place! And the soldiers who nailed him to that cross, and for all people everywhere of all time. Yes, he dies for us. And yes, he also dies, for them.

In this moment, when Mary and Joseph flee with Jesus to Egypt, He lives in order to die. What an amazing moment. And truly, what amazing love. Because it was the love of God that sent His Son Jesus Christ to us, in the first place, to die in our place and save us from our sin. It was the love and care of Jesus Christ that caused him to look down upon those who were crucifying him, whipping him, spitting on him, and beating him, and say “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” For we, are the sinful ones. We are the evil ones, we are the ones that have committed terrible and horrible atrocities not against each other, but against God alone. And while we may not order the killing of innocent children, we still break the Law. We still sin every day in our daily lives with what we have done, and with what we have not done. And when we sin, we sin against our Heavenly Father, we sin against Jesus Christ. But we live our lives, not as those who have no hope and peace, but as those who are forgiven. We live with the assurance that our sins are forgiven by Christ’s death on the cross, when He took all the sins of mankind upon himself, and paid the price. It was the culmination of His coming. It was the reason that He was born in a manger. It was the reason that Mary and Joseph had to get up and flee from a paranoid and evil King. His death, was the reason that He lived, because by His death, we are given life.

The sequel to the Christmas story is not as nice and peaceful as the scene we see of Jesus born in a manger. And I can assure you that we will hear plenty more about Jesus Christ in the weeks to come. We will continue, to study and learn of the historical events that happened after Christmas. We will get the opportunity, to come to God’s House, and hear His Word which teaches us and guides us in our lives. We will be blessed with the holy body and blood of Jesus Christ that we are given here for the forgiveness of our sins. And most importantly, after all the bows and the lights of the Christmas season are taken down, and we return to the routines that we have become accustomed to in our daily lives, we will have the opportunity, to share the true message of Christmas with those who desperately need to hear it. The message of the child who was saved from death, in order to die, for the salvation of all, which is true, but most importantly, who has saved you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.