

### Epiphany Part 3 (The Holy Innocents)

A reading from the book of Matthew, Chapter 2, verses 16-18: <sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

<sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: <sup>18</sup>“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”  
((This is the Word of the Lord- Thanks be to God.))

Who was kept from moving? Who never grew up to be a disciple? Who never heard about this boy called Jesus? Who was kept from their future because of jealousy and anger and hatred? Who was kept from moving?

I had not heard this scripture before. I haven't heard it preached from a pulpit. I had not known that Joseph was required to move his family in the night to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. I hadn't heard that children were killed in Bethlehem simply because they were around the same age as Jesus and in the same general area. I had not heard of the Holy Innocents. In these lines of scripture, Herod goes into a rage, because apparently he has been tricked by the magi, and he orders that all children be killed. It seems like Herod got tired of being subtle about this particular problem of the King of the Jews being born in Bethlehem. Herod shows no subtlety in keeping up the illusion that he wanted to worship this child as well. No, there is no subtlety anymore.

When Herod loses the illusion of caring about simply seeing this child, he shows clearly that he never had any intention to be calm, caring, or respectful toward the humanity he ruled over. But my question remains, why did the others have to die. Who was kept from moving? These children. All the children of Bethlehem. They were kept from moving because Herod was bound and determined to kill any child that could possibly be Jesus. Is there hope here? Is there anything to hold onto from this passage that could possibly point to a moment of safety and space of feeling at home.

Every commentary that I read on this mentions how God provides for us while we are in troubled times. And that is absolutely true. There have been moments in my life, and I'm sure in each of our lives, that God has provided safety when we thought we would never be safe again. God provided that security and the moments of escape right in the nick of time. But Jesus' safety is not my focus today. As thankful as I am that Jesus was safe and as incredible as it is that Joseph's dreams brought safety and security to the holy family. Those things are important. Those things are valued.

Who was kept from moving though? Who wasn't able to move toward this holy star in the heavens? Who was kept from moving toward the Son of God? These children. There was never a chance for them. They were the most innocent of the players. They are not the ones who "tricked" Herod. They were not the ones who seemed to threaten the entire empire. They were not the ones seeking to kill anyone who got in their way. No, these children, who were killed by the King were simply the same age as a different child, in the place where this other child was supposed to be.

Jeremiah 31:15 says,

The Lord proclaims:

A voice is heard in Ramah,

weeping and wailing.

It's Rachel crying for her children;

she refuses to be consoled,

because her children are no more.

Rachel was not the only mother weeping. The women who lost their youngest child were weeping. The siblings who watched their brother be murdered were weeping. The fathers who lost their daughters were weeping. None of them could be consoled. Because their children were no more.

Who was kept from moving?

The holy innocents.

But don't rest easy, the story of the holy innocents isn't complete yet.