

Advent 2017 – The Unexpected Sorrow

Text: **Matthew 2:13-23**

This evening once again we will attempt to gain a new appreciation and perspective of the coming of our Lord Jesus by being carried back in time. Again then we must leave behind the world as we know it and be transported back through the centuries. Again we must first clear so much clutter and debris from our minds – so much history, science, medicine. Erase from your hearts and thoughts, from your world, all the knowledge, the materialism, the technology of over two millennia. There are no cars, no guns, no machinery, nothing that uses electricity. Music as we know it, books, magazines, toys, dolls, games – all gone. Take your minds once again to a rather gentle, pastoral place – a place of wood and stone, of baked clay and livestock. This is your world. The year is 2 BC.

So much has happened in the year just past, so much indeed for a place that previously knew so little change or excitement. It has been many months since the birth of the King of kings was announced by the angels to the shepherd. Those shepherds even now continue to talk about all that they witnessed that night – to anyone and everyone who will listen. As you know, Mary and Joseph did not remain in the stable after the birth of their special Child but moved from there into a house in Bethlehem. Shortly thereafter, as you also know, the great star appeared and came to stop over that house. It was that star that led the Magi to us, to Bethlehem and to the very house where Jesus and his parents were living. And what great gifts they brought to the Baby-King, the Child who had been named Jesus by his parents (so named, so it is said, at the command of an angel).

What excitement for such a small and insignificant place. With the message of the angels and the testimony of the great star there could be no doubt that the promise of our God had finally been fulfilled before our very eyes. The Savior – promised of old – had been born. God had kept his great promise to send the Messiah – as God always keeps his promises. How foolish for us to have doubted, for *God* had prophesied, *God* had promised. Yet that was not the end of the excitement in this place and at this time. Would

that it were. Hear now the events that followed. Hear, and remember:

Matthew 2:13-15 *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." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ 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."*

This evening once again Bethlehem is quiet and you are deep in your thoughts as you sit staring into the fire of yet another evening. Your little town, your world, has returned once again to sameness. Your heart is still full from the events of the past months, but there is also now a lingering sadness, an emptiness. Just as suddenly as the Child and his parents appeared, now, just as suddenly, they are gone. They left in the night, and no one seems to know how or why they left. Nor does anyone know where it is they have gone. They have been gone for many days now. A week? Several weeks? Who remembers? They (along with the crowds that came for the census) are gone, and once again the routine of small town life has returned to Bethlehem. That is what fills your mind when you first hear the horses.

It starts as a vague impression that something is not right. Your subconscious detects sounds that as yet do not register in your mind. The sound grows, and as it swells your very heart constricts. The sounds that reach your ears are not the curious sounds of a minor commotion somewhere in the village; they are the sounds of terror. The sounds grow to a tumult as they intensify and surround you, drawing ever closer. Something is obviously very wrong, and as you rush from your house you see the first of the soldiers.

The sight that will forever be burned into your memory is beyond comprehension or reason. The soldiers are not raiding bands of Moabites or Syrians; they are not even enemies. They are the men of your own king, and what they are doing is a horror

beyond words. They are systematically entering each house in your peaceful little village and slaughtering the children. No, not all children, just the very youngest, and only the boys. Parents everywhere are struggling mightily to protect their infant sons, but resistance is futile. Before you can even comprehend the horror of what is happening, strong arms have grabbed you as other men enter your home. Blind terror fills your heart as you hear the sounds within. Moments later the men emerge and move to the next house. From house to house, and from farm to farm, the unspeakable is repeated.

Matthew 2:16-18 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Herod's cruelty was well known, but this was beyond comprehension. Why? And why the children? And then the answer came to you – not the children, the boys. The baby boys. This is about the Baby-King that had been born. Herod fears for his throne and, knowing the man's paranoia and cruelty, there is nothing he will not do to protect his own power and position. Then too you realized why the Child's mother and father had taken the boy and fled so suddenly in the night.

In the days to come you would hear more of the utter ruthlessness of this man. Nearing death, and fearing above all things that he would never be mourned by his people, who hated him with such a passion, Herod orders that all the leading men of Israel are to be arrested and imprisoned. His orders are to have them all slaughtered at the moment of his death so that there would be mourning in Israel when he died – if not *for* him, then at least at the same time. By the grace of God, after his death those who succeeded him refused to carry out his murderous plan.

For so many centuries you and your forefathers had prayed for the great promise to be fulfilled. Finally the Messiah came, and with him came death and heartache. How could anyone make any sense at all of these events? How could anyone continue to believe in the love and mercy of a God who would allow a horror like this to befall the very souls who had just witnessed the birth of his Son, the promised Savior? Nothing seemed to make any sense. The world, once so bright and full of hope, was filled with black, debilitating sadness. Why?

But then your mind returns to the words of the Prophet, and you realize that the words are no longer a vague foretelling of the sorrow of others; they speak of your own personal anguish: "**A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.**" Yours is the voice heard in Ramah. Yours is the weeping and the anguish, for yours is the child that was senselessly slaughtered.

Matthew 2:19-23 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Forward we travel again through the centuries, until we stand once again in the present. All around us we see that very little has changed. The brutality and the violence are still with us, awash in a sea of hypocrisy and blasphemy. We live in a society that continues to doubt and blaspheme God for allowing the horror of the slaughter in Bethlehem, even while they themselves slaughter hundreds of thousands of children every single year – infants who never even have the chance to see the light of day outside of their mothers' wombs.

The truth of the matter is that *God* didn't kill the babies of Bethlehem. *Man* did - just as man continues to disobey his Creator in every conceivable way every single day. The proper question then is not "*How could God have allowed this to happen?*" It is, "*Why did God bother to send his own precious Son into a world like ours to save the likes of us?*"

When the Children of Israel prayed all those years for the Savior to finally come as promised, little did they know what the coming of that Child would bring. God knew, as did his Son. Jesus himself said, "***Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.***" (Matthew 10:34) Jesus was not sent to bring carnal security or materialistic bliss to a lovely world. He entered a world of brutality and sin to rescue barbarians from what we deserved. The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem was simply one of the earliest manifestations of the rage on the part all that is evil against the Holy God. All history, ancient and modern, is full of such barbarity. It is only here, in the manger, and then again on the cross, that we see a pure and holy light shining in an otherwise black and terrifying world.

As you look again to the manger this Advent season, see that perfect, holy Child with eyes that truly comprehend. Look with eyes that recognize the complete and utter perversion into which God sent his Son, that darkness made blacker by your own sin. Then understand exactly what kind of a prayer God the Father answered when mankind long ago prayed, "*Father in heaven, send your Son into this world, as you promised.*" Look with eyes that now comprehend and appreciate. Look and see what we asked our God to do for us. Look and see, and believe – for *this* is the world that "***God loved so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***" Amen.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave, Bismarck, ND 58501

Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Visit Our Website – www.bismarcklutheran.com

Mark Johnson, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Midweek Advent Services – 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn (56)

Liturgy – A Service of the Word (Supplement page 22)

The Scripture Reading for the Day

(November 29) John 7:37-47 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ⁴⁰ ¶ When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?" ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. ⁴⁵ ¶ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived?"

(December 6) 1 Peter 4:12-19 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. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

(December 13) John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ ¶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Who sent His Son to be my Savior;*

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, And by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, Walk in Christ, Show forth His praises, And will one day live and reign with Him in all eternity. Amen.

The Pre-Sermon Hymn (20)

The Sermon Theme – "The Joy and Sorrow of Jesus' Birth"

Nov 29: His arrival is sudden, though expected (*Isaiah 40:1-5*)

Dec. 6: His arrival brings sorrow, which is unexpected (*Matthew 2:13-18*)

Dec. 13: His arrival brings comfort, which is certain (*Jeremiah 31:15-17*)

The Offertory – [Sung by All]

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit.
Amen.

The Post Sermon Hymn (703)

The Collect for Peace

Pastor: *The Lord will bless His people.*

Congregation: *The Lord will bless His people with peace.*

Pastor: Lord God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, give unto Your servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be prepared to obey Your commandments, and also that we, being defended by You from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in peace and quietness. This we ask through the merits of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Congregation: *Amen.*

The Prayers of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction *(Spoken by the Pastor)*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Congregation: *(Sung)* Amen.

The Closing Hymn *(76 Stanzas 1 & 4)*

Silent Prayer

Sermon Texts:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 40:1-5** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

^{ESV} **Matthew 2:13-18** 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." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 31:15-17** Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." ¹⁶ Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. ¹⁷ There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country."

- Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table to be used next week -

Advent 2017



The joy and sorrow of Jesus' birth

- The expected surprise
- The unexpected sorrow
- The certain comfort

St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, ND