

The light of Christmas meets the darkness of malevolent power corrupted by fear and suspicion. On one side: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men.” And on the other side, a terrifying, perpetual bad will, the dying breath of a dead regime which hates light, the world, freedom, love, and desires to utterly uproot them with no pity whatsoever. What do these authorities care about the crying and weeping of mothers who cannot and will not be comforted? Two thousand years have passed since that time, but the same two forces continue to face each other on our long-suffering planet: the authority of naked power, blind in its fear and terrifying in its cruelty; and the radiant authority of Bethlehem's child. It may seem that all power, all might, is in the hands of that earthly authority, its police, its interrogators, its immoral cadre of late-night operatives. But only apparently: for the star, and the image of mother and Child never stop shining; the song is not silenced, “Glory to God in the highest”; and faith, hope and love live on. Christmas has come and gone, but its radiance remains.

—Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) in *Celebration of Faith: Sermons* (Vol. 2) (translated from the Russian, 1994)



We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

Old Orchard Church
January 13, 2013 — 10:15 to 11:50 am.



Be faithful even to the point of death,
and I will give you the crown of life.
—Revelation 2:10—

Celebrating Jesus, Incarnate Son of God: Lord of the Martyrs

All do not bend the knee to the Christchild:
In Herod's slaughter of Bethlehem's "flowerets"
Are fulfilled the foreboding words of the psalm:
**"The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers gather together against the Lord
And against his Anointed One."**

The first New Covenant martyrs—
Those who die for the cause of Christ—
Are the infants of Bethlehem.
And down the corridor of history,
From every land and people,
Follow a long line of witnesses,
Killed for their loyalty to Jesus.

Being faithful, even unto death,
And loving God more than life itself,
They receive the promised crown
And trust him who says,
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness:
Praise the Sovereign who says,
"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his godly ones."
Alleluia!



Today's Scripture

Old Testament Lesson: Daniel 3:16-28
New Testament Lesson: Matthew 2:12-23

Today's Sermon

"Living Our Joy in the Present Evil Age"
Matthew 2:12-23; Galatians 1:1-5
Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

After Christmas

No sooner have we encountered the joy of Christmas, that celebration of peace and goodwill radiating from the Child of Bethlehem, than the gospel calls us to witness an explosion of horrific malice toward him, a malice which will never end and never weaken. [*There follows here Matthew's account of Herod's clandestine attempt to find the baby Jesus, and his subsequent slaughter of the baby boys of Bethlehem.*]

Such is the gospel account. Let us leave aside some of the questions this story undoubtedly raises for modern readers: Who were these wise men who came from the East to worship Christ? How do we understand the star that led them to Bethlehem? Which prophets foretold the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem? And so on. These questions have all been researched by many scholars of Holy Scripture, and while their conclusions are interesting, the most important aspect of the story is elsewhere: Herod's reaction.

Historically, we know that Herod reigned in Palestine with the consent and protection of the Roman occupiers, and that he was a cruel and unjust tyrant. In his reaction to the birth of Christ, the gospel gives us an eternal portrait of earthly authority whose sole purpose and full strength is devoted to holding, wielding and defending its power against any perceived threat to its existence. Don't we ourselves so well know this experience? Above all, Herod is fearful and suspicious. How, we might ask, could a child possibly be a threat, a child for whose very birth no place could be found except a cave? But for Herod it was enough that someone—in this case, those mysterious wise men from the East—gave the name "king" to this unknown, poor and helpless child. Nothing more was needed to set in motion the machinery of criminal investigation, search, interrogation and persecution.

"Then Herod secretly called the wise men..." It had to be in secret, for this type of authority knows it can operate only when its work is carried out in secret, and that means without law, without justice. And then, "Go," Herod tells the wise men, "and search diligently for the child." He gives the order to investigate, to "build a case," to prepare it carefully so there are no slips or blunders as the reprisal is readied. And then a lie: "Bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him." How often we have seen this kind of lie that takes shape so methodically as it prepares to strike. And finally, the insane and bloody reprisal: to destroy one, kill hundreds. Take no chances, stop at nothing. And all to protect the coveted power which has no other means of support except violence, cruelty and readiness to kill.

Continue on the back....