

**Sermon Notes – January 1, 2023**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 2: 13-23**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Bearing Christ’s Name”**

This day’s readings bear a sobering reminder, should we need it, that not everything about the marvelous incarnation we celebrate in this season remains mysterious. Every child born flesh and blood enters a world of violence, suffering, and certain death. No one escapes. Then again-and this is the promise each reading makes-no one suffers or dies alone, and we need not live under the domination and fear of death.

In some new post-exile moment of crisis and fear of abandonment, Isaiah<sup>63</sup> recalls the long history of *hesed* (loving kindness, unfailing faithfulness) God has shown Israel. In Hebrews, the “mercy” of God cited in verse 7 is *rechumim*, the word for “womb.” This describes how God carries His people, and where He saves (literally, “makes a place for”) Israel-in His own belly. In God’s heart. We suffer nothing apart from God.

The letter to the Hebrews insists that whatever atonement might mean, it means nothing unless Christ fully shares our flesh and blood and knows through hard, genuine experience the depth of our weakness, the bitterness of our suffering, and the terror of confronting death. The priest who intercedes for us knows whereof he speaks.

The screams and wailing that resound in Matthew’s dark birth narrative nearly drown out the angelic peace songs Luke invites us to join. The racket echoes all the way back to Genesis and Exodus, to a Joseph whose dreams ultimately landed him in Egypt. There a cruel king ordered the death of Hebrew babies. Among them was born a deliverer who escaped the slaughter and would one day lead the people out of the Egypt of slavery.

In case we don’t recognize the ancient story of deliverance running now in reverse, Matthew quotes Hosea 11 (“out of Egypt I call my son,” v. 1), in which

God, the brokenhearted parent of rebellious Israel, declares, "They shall return to the land of Egypt" (v. 5) and, "The sword rages in their cities" (v. 6). And yet the very thought of abandoning child Ephraim/Israel crushes God's heart as did the brimstone that destroyed Sodom. God stays His wrath and remains "the Holy One in your midst" (v. 9), come what may. What came after Hosea's day was horrific, but according to his vision and Matthew's as well, where stones fly and nails pierce God, our Emmanuel, suffers the blows with us.

With similar poignancy, Matthew recalls Jeremiah's invocation of Rachel's disconsolate weeping. Those who have stopped to listen, from ancient rabbis to Martin Luther, have understood that only God can address such tears and it costs God plenty.