

Sermon Notes – December 29, 2024
First Sunday of Christmas
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 2: 13-23
Peace Lutheran Church
“There Is Still Evil in the World”

This is an unquestionably difficult Sunday for us preachers. Worship attendance may be expected to be low, as families are away or traveling back to their homes from the Christmas break. Travels can also be rushed and unpredictable, and weather conditions can prove formidable and dangerous. For those of us who are here in this sanctuary, we read Matthew's accounting of the shocking slaughter of the innocent, a story avoided more often than confronted. Yet, as the author of Hebrews says in today's passage, Jesus came to be among those who suffer so that He might experience death Himself, that death might be defeated. So, in this very human and tragic story, we may still find the hope of the gospel.

Since people we read Luke's version of the infancy narrative, as appointed by the lectionary for the two liturgies on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the shift to Matthew's account this Sunday takes a tragic turn, and might come as a surprise to some who are less familiar with it. Yet this week's gospel contains many focal points that are central to Matthew but absent from Luke, any of which could be worthy of preaching and teaching during this time.

For instance, a preacher has the opportunity today to explore Joseph's point of view and his faithful following of God's direction, especially if that was not a focus during Advent 4. Joseph wisely discerns God's direction and has the courage to follow His guidance and, in doing so, provides for and protects his family.

The magi, on their way out in today's gospel but easily alluded to, present another option. They play an integral role in Matthew's narrative, although they are not included in Luke's. They are foreigners, and yet they recognize the kingship of the newborn Jesus. At the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus will task the disciples with bringing His message to *all* nations (28: 19). Here at the beginning of the gospel, that wide inclusivity of Jesus' ministry has already begun, even though He is just a baby.

One final example: Matthew tells the story of Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt with their child. This offers an important opportunity to name the holy family as refugees who are displaced by violence and must make their way to a neighboring nation in hopes of finding safety. That situation remains to this day - countless families and children in similar circumstances fleeing homelands due to the madness of Herod-like evil.