

Sermon Sunday after Nativity

Galatians 1:11-19 (§200) Matthew 2:13-23 (§4) Paul's conversion: Herod kills the children.

CHRIST IS BORN!!

Today we celebrate the leave-taking of Nativity. It is also the Sunday after Nativity, so we celebrate the kinsmen of the Lord: Joseph the betrothed, David the King, James the brother of the Lord.

James was the first bishop of Jerusalem. When the council of Jerusalem is called, it is James who presides over it. It is likely that James was the son of Joseph from an earlier marriage. The words of that time were not so concerned with describing the precise relationship. Cousins, siblings, half siblings were covered under the same word. The icon of the escape to Egypt often will depict James prodding the donkey on while Joseph attends to Mary.

Wisemen from Babylon have just left; and Joseph takes Mary and Jesus into Egypt. This is to indicate the what Christ will accomplish is for all mankind. Christ and the Holy Family leave a dangerous place to trek the desert to go into another country for safety. Just as Abraham did before Him, He leaves the city of His birth. Just as Israel (Jacob) did before Him, He goes to Egypt for safety. He becomes a fugitive.

And the reason for their escape into Egypt was that Herod wanted to kill Jesus.

Herod was not a very stable person; some might call him mad. When he was troubled (which was often) Herod's court had to find ways of dealing with him. He sees a threat to his position, and he reacts in fear. In his fear he has many young children killed, including two of his own sons. In his fear, he destroys all that he should have loved, including himself.

And his actions wound others — . . . deeply. . . with the deepest of wounds. . . mothers watched their little sons being murdered before their eyes. Ramah was the seat of the judge Deborah; Ramah was the home of Samuel the priest, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. Ramah was the seat of the tribe of Benjamin, whose mother was Rachel. There was a memorial to Rachel near Bethlehem. The Gospel quotes the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in **Ramah**, lamentation, and bitter weeping and wailing; Rachel would not cease weeping for her children — because they are no more.”

The proto martyrs of proto martyrs. . . all because of the ego, and fear of a madman who was their ruler. . . all because of his fear and obsession.

How can we apply this to ourselves? Herod is such an extreme case that it is easy to think that this cannot possibly apply to us. But let us not think that this is just about someone else.

What are some of the things we obsess about? that we have our ego bound up in, that we have let our fears make decisions for us — and don't see how we are destroying what we love?

The Word of God took on our flesh from the Theotokos – took on our wounds, but without wounding Himself as we often do, to the astonishment of the demons who would never think of what we freely do to ourselves. He took on our flesh so that He could heal our wounds and bring us to salvation.

The Eternal God became a little child – humbled Himself for our sake, that He might live this human life that we usually mess up, so that He could reclaim it for Himself and offer it to His Father.

By His death He conquered our enemy – death, . . . and made a path for us to His Kingdom.

By taking on our humanity, He, the Eternal invisible God the Word became visible. . . a little child.