

## **1 Christmas A**

Isaiah 63:7-9

Psalms 148

Hebrews 2:10-18

Matthew 2:13-23

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Baptism: Mabel Rose Walker

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Grace and peace to you from the incarnate God in Jesus!

Sometimes I wonder what they were thinking (whoever 'they' are) who choose the readings for the year. With all the wonderful texts to choose from, the readings for the first Sunday after Christmas run red with the blood of children and blatantly thrust us into the reality of an imperfect world. Hardly what we wish to think about in the midst of leftover turkey and holiday baking.

Joseph and Mary cuddled and fed their newborn son when suddenly the romantic scene is shaken apart with the reality of their day – Herod was a cruel and jealous king, who would stop at nothing to ensure the security of his kingdom, power, and wealth. As we hear about heavenly messengers and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stealing safely away, we can almost miss the gruesome details of what happened but, Matthew dares to reveal the truth rather than cover it up.

Infuriated at being tricked by the Wise men, the nation's leader, King Herod sent messengers of another kind – soldiers who were ordered to kill every child under 2 years old. It's a story that harkens back to Exodus, when Pharaoh too set out to kill all the children. The voice heard in the streets was not the sound of newly composed Christmas carols but, that of families in terror and grief.

It's hard to imagine, but we are no stranger to such tragedy. Have we not all been witness to the detainment of migrants this last year; families being separated from one another, children behind bars with no comfort of secure arms to hold them? History repeats itself.

The question I most often get with a readings like this is – how could God allow such things to happen? Innocent children? Families looking for a better life? Sometimes people even use stories like this to justify why they don't or won't believe in God because they don't want a God that would allow things like this.

So what kind of a God do we want?

If you lived in Isaiah's time you, along with everyone else, wanted a God who would rescue them like a Knight on a white steed. They didn't have

time for God when things were going well. But then they found themselves in a difficult situation – conquered by Assyria they were without a homeland, or work, or freedom, or security. They wanted a God who would come to set things right again.

King Herod too wanted a god. He wanted one that would sit under his feet and not interfere with his greed, selfishness, and pride. He wanted a god that would enhance his already oppressive kingdom. He wanted a god who would look the other way.

And how about us? What kind of a god are we looking for? Sometimes I think we want a god who will cover up our mistakes and numb the pain that we encounter in our world. Or perhaps a god who will assume responsibility for our actions (or inaction.) Maybe we want a god we can blame when we hear of whole nations starving, of people killing one another. We want a god who will reward faith and condemn those without. We want a god who won't look as we buy more stuff and bigger homes.

But we didn't get a god like that. We didn't get a god who sides with the powerful or a god that favors the wealthy, the white, the straight, the beautiful. We didn't get a god who shows up in special effects to dazzle us into submission.

What we did get instead is a God who knows pain and who refuses to turn away from the worst we can muster, a God who faces darkness head on saying, "that's exactly why I came."

It is precisely because of trouble that God came in person in Jesus. God knew about the ugly side of the world, knew about the cover-ups, the lies, the cheating. He still sees the hate, the way we abuse one another, the times we look the other way. He feels the hurt and anger when loved ones die or when we become sick. He even knows about the so called gods we would like to have. And rather than turn away, or send a "lightening bolt" to fix it all, or even cover it up for us – he said "I better get down there!"

And so God came. In person. Right into the middle of the worst of human conditions – sin. She came because we kill one another. She came because Herod was an evil man. She came because illness can strike old and young alike. She came because we cannot save ourselves. And thank God we didn't get a god fashioned by our imaginations, but we got a God who chooses to love us anyway. We got a God who came in person to die for us.

And that's the amazing part of it all. When the world was the last place that God would want to be, they came anyway. In Hebrews we hear: God came to share in the same things that we experience. They came as one us to be with us in our joy, our pain, and even in our death. They came so that despite these things we might know that in God we have life.

Today we heard this promise again as Mabel was baptized. Her family, travelling from afar, are among us today as timely reminders to us of the hope we have in a very loving God. In water and word, in every moment of joy or sorrow, God is with Mabel and will never leave her. Remarkably, that same promise is for all of us.

Amen.