

Natalie Ford
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 First Sunday of Christmas

Being Faithful in Evil Times
Matthew 2:13-23

Children bring some of the most fun moments to Christmastime. One of my favorite little Christmas funnies is about a little girl came home from Sunday school waving a paper for her mother to see. "Look Mommy," she exclaimed, "Teacher says I drew the most unusual Christmas picture she ever saw!"

Her mother took one look and had to agree with the teacher. Hoping her daughter could explain her creation, the mother asked, "Why are all these people riding in the back of an airplane?"

"Well, Mommy, that's the flight into Egypt."

Accepting that, mother asked another question: "Who is this mean-looking man in the front?" Her daughter answered quickly and knowingly: "That's Pontius, the Pilot."

Looking at the picture even more closely, the mother said, "I see you have Mary and Joseph and the baby. But who is this large man sitting behind Mary?"

"Can't you tell?" the little girl asked, beginning to shake her head in disappointment. "That's Round John Virgin."

John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, Preaching Today

Children have such a precious *innocence*, especially evident at Christmas. We sometimes forget that not only was our Savior born as a baby at Christmas, but the lives of many babies were taken after his birth by the evil, jealous King Herod.

The slaughter of the *innocents* is part of the Christmas story as well. Evil Herod's anger forced Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt, and caused countless families to lose their sons, 2 years old and younger.

Herod is an important part of the story today because he symbolizes the evil and brokenness that still exists in our world, the sin that breaks hearts, *and the reason we need a Savior* born at Christmas.

In today's passage, the celebration of Christmas is *not* idealistic. Today we are reminded that the world can be harsh, especially for children.

In the sweet book, *Children's Letters to God*, the very first letter in the book reads: "Dear God, In Sunday School they told us what you do. Who does it, God, when you are on vacation?"

Sometimes it seems with all the suffering in this world, that God is on *vacation, doesn't it?*

We have all heard the shocking statistics on children.

24,000 children die everyday globally from preventable disease.

1 in 5 children in Oklahoma are poor.

(Tulsa World Jan 10, 2010).

Oklahoma is one of the worst in the country for child abuse, teen pregnancy, and now child sex trafficking

(O.A.T.H. 2010)

Online threats include porn, bullying, even suicide.

It is a *dangerous world* for the young.

As it was in the time of Jesus' birth.

Herod was so enraged when he was deceived by the wise men, that "he killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were *two years old or under.*"

According to Matthew, this fulfilled the nightmare,

The tragic prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15, which warned:

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

According to Jewish historian, Josephus, Herod was a *horribly cruel* man, who even ordered the execution of three of his sons (Caesar in Rome is reported to have said it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son); and at his burial, one member of every family was to be slain so that the nation might really mourn. But, Herod did not manage to kill Jesus.

God spoke to Joseph in a *dream* sending them to Egypt.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt and lived there as refugees

until after it was safe to return back to the Promised Land, when Herod had died, this fulfilled Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

But what a life—running away from a tyrant.

Surely Joseph wondered if they would be safe in Egypt as refugees, or would they run into more trouble?

Joseph has two more dreams and God speaks to him, telling him when Herod has died and it's safe to return to *Israel*. And in another dream, Joseph is warned not to settle in Judea, where Herod's cruel son Archelaus rules.

Instead he was told to settle in *Nazareth* in the district of Galilee.

Thankfully, Herod *did not win*.

Do you ever wonder if evil does win?

The good news of Christmas, is that

Sooner or later all the Herods of the world lose their power and die.

Do you remember just what was born for us on Christmas?

God's love became flesh on Christmas.

A *Savior* has been born for us,

A Savior from all that is cruel and evil,

from all the sin in this world, and in our hearts.....

And his name is Jesus, *Emmanuel*, God with us.

We may have Rachels weeping in our world,

and innocent children who have been hurt or lost.

We might ask, why does God not save more children?

But a Savior *has been born* for us.

And perhaps the better question to ask this Christmas is,

Who am I, now that He has come?

Are we Christians? If so, we are the body of Christ now...

We are the hands and feet of the Savior born in the Bethlehem!

A Savior has been born so now....

We can tutor those kids at our adopted school *Mills*.

Those who are at risk of not learning to read, or not succeeding—they are the ones who need the most attention to prevent them from harm in this world.

A Savior has been born so that...

We can bring those students in at *VBS and Fall Fest*,

Show them a safe and loving environment, the love of Jesus Christ that is here for them, especially if they do not have that elsewhere.

A Savior has been born so now...

We can continue to support *OCR and the Pastor's Fund*,

Helping the needy of Owasso means helping children, at least 40 of the 125 people that we helped this year were children—who need things like shelter, electricity and water to thrive.

A Savior Jesus Christ has been born for us, so...

We can support *Malawi*, for the church there is exploding like you wouldn't believe, and children are coming to Sunday school and church in droves, and people like Luso teach classes with 100 to 200 kids each week!

A Savior was born in Bethlehem, so that we might....
 Support Sarah our Youth Director, and our *youth group*, their programs, their mission trips, their youth Sundays and their dreams—for they are becoming the leaders and ministers in our midst!

Our Savior Emmanuel, was born at Christmas, so let us...
 Love our *children* in this church like there is no tomorrow,
 And provide them with the best programs and curriculum
 and teaching we possibly can.
 We can go all out for them, and for their parents and their families,
 knowing that they are the future of this church,
 that their minds and hearts are little sponges for the gospel
 and the good news that we have to offer.
 We can pour time, talent and money into our ministry to the little ones.

Sure, there is still evil in the world.
But why did He come? Why was he born?
 To be the Savior of the world
 Jesus--Emmanuel, God with us, and in us, and living through us.

And ***Who are We?***
 God's beloved children, freed from the power of evil.....
And given the power and courage
 To love the innocent and let them know they are loved.
 So that Rachel is not weeping in our midst.

And when some are ***weeping***,
 He came, that we might love them, and hold them,
 and bring them the comfort of our loving God
 Who holds us up when life has brought us down.

This is the ***Good News*** of Christmas
 the baby born in Bethlehem Is our Savior
 And we are His people....He lives on in us....
 Until one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess
 That He is Christ the Lord. Amen.