

THE UGLY SIDE OF CHRISTMAS

It is the world's unbelief that hates God's Son
It is to pay for the world's sin that God sent his Son.
Matthew 2:13-23

TEXT: *When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

It's an age-old question. An enigma that often leads many into a cynical view of God. If God is an almighty God of love, why does he allow such horrible acts of despicable evil?

Before us is the historical account of Herod's jealous fear of royal competition. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and after the Lord led the Wise Men from the east to Bethlehem to worship their Savior, the Bible says: *When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.* Now that 2000 years has passed, the world gives little attention to this horrible massacre. But when a terrorist group called Boko Haram kidnaped over 250 Nigerian school girls, even our president's wife took notice. She started a campaign with the hashtag: "BringBackOurGirls."

How can there be a God in the heavens who would allow such atrocities? How can he be a God of love?

What Scripture records for us could be rightly called "THE UGLY SIDE OF CHRISTMAS." Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and because of baby Jesus, historians estimate some 20-40 baby boys were brutally murdered. They also say that there is evidence that Herod even murdered his own baby son.

THE UGLY SIDE OF CHRISTMAS is this: It is the world's unbelief that hates God's Son; yet It is to pay for the world's sin that God sent his Son.

A disturbing fact is that it is because of the Wise Men who came to worship Jesus that these babies die. Recall the conversation that they had with king Herod a few days earlier. The Wise Men naturally expected that the birth of a Jewish king, especially the One whose birth had been prophesied by Israel's own prophets for some 1500 years, would be placed in an ornate cradle in the capital city of Jerusalem. They paraded through Jerusalem's streets and up through the royal courtyard to the throne of Herod and asked: *Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?* Then it says: *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written..."*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and ... said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." Mt 2 It was all a pretense. Herod wanted to find Jesus and kill him.

But we cannot blame these godly Wise Men. The fact of the matter is that it is because of Jesus himself that these Bethlehem babies die. The fact is that the world hates the Son of God, and therefore it hates God himself. This is the Scriptural truth about unbelief, for ... *there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men-the testimony given in its proper time.*

1 Ti 2 Unbelief doesn't feel its need for a "mediator" or a "go-between between God and man. It doesn't accept the fact that ALL men and sinful, by nature, and under the wrath of God and would be damned forever if God had not graciously provided a perfect Substitute for the sin of all mankind.

Even people who call themselves "Christians" are offended by this and cannot accept the fact that the Lord allowed such a massacre of little children. They scratch their heads and wonder: If God knew that Herod was going to do this, why didn't he send a warning for ALL the babies of Bethlehem? Or why did he let such a thing happen? Why didn't God do something?"

Such talk is not Christian at all, for it denies the fact that all of us are sinful and deserve not only suffering and death now, but eternal death and damnation, and that God did do something! Yet, the UGLY SIDE OF CHRISTMAS still surrounds us is that there are still those who try to join us in its celebration while ignorant of its purpose. They are those may go to church on Christmas but when the season of Lent and Good Friday come around they are never seen in church. They might come to church on Easter because that's also a fine time to be seen in the Christian community.

But here is the irony of faith in God's Word: it is the ugliness of Good Friday and Jesus' death on the cross that makes Christmas a season of great joy for all who know and believe that the Baby Jesus of Bethlehem died for MY sins to bring me to God and eternal life in heaven.

Think about your sins. I'm not talking about your big ones for which you prayed for forgiveness, but for the little ones for which you joined the world in saying, "God's not going to condemn me for that!" You see, it's easy for us to forget that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that like Isaiah confessed, *all my righteous acts are filthy rags...* Is 64 But when we consider the history before us, we are reminded that our salvation is totally out of our own hands and that it is by God's grace alone that we have come to know Jesus as our king and Savior as did those ancient Wise Men who traveled a great distance along dangerous roads simply to worship their Savior.

Herod's plan to find and kill Jesus would fail because the Lord would warn Mary and Joseph: *an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."* Instead of questioning God's reasoning as to why he would warn Joseph and not the rest of the mothers of Bethlehem of Herod's plans, consider the fact that all this happened because God had prophesied this event: *And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."* And then, after Herod finally died: *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ... and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."* It is the fulfillment of ancient prophecy that assures us that all that is said about Baby Jesus is true: our sins are forgiven for Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Today, the ugly side of Christmas is in how few people know the reason for which God's Son was given. Few people therefore know the beautiful side of Good Friday and the beauty of the cross on which Jesus died. God's people know. Like the Wise Men who travelled a great distance and who risked their lives only to worship, those who are the Wise Men of this generation travel Sunday after Sunday to worship the Lord who gave himself that we might have life in his name. If the Wise Men would have been given the opportunity to have the Lord's Supper, they who traveled such a distance would never miss the simple opportunity that the Lord has given us to worship and to receive this blessed assurance. If the Wise Men would have had the opportunity to learn God's Word as the children of our congregation do, they would join us in our glad support of it in every way.

What Herod did to those families in Bethlehem brought great pain and sorrow. What you and I did to God brought us Jesus who was willing to die, not just for our sins, but even for the sins of that murderer, Herod. So to know the beauty and joy of Christmas is to know the beauty of the cross of Christ. Amen.