

St. Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church
 Holy Innocents
 December 28, 2025
 rmcneely+

These were redeemed from among men
 Being the first fruits unto God and the Lamb.

Ours is a difficult task this morning.

After our solemn 4 week penitential Advent preparation
 to receive our Lord; Christmas arrived;
 we soar to the heights of the glorious celebration
 of His incarnation and entry into our lives,
 after the Christmas Pageant, the charm of our children
 after the soaring music of Christmas,
 after St Luke's poetic nativity story
 after the warm greetings of our friends and family,
 gatherings and feasts
 After our spirits are lifted up with the joy of Christmas
 after all the magic and wonder of the Christmas season ;

And with the echoes of Silent Night still resonating in our heads,

Suddenly, within 72 hours; everything changes.
 we must face this crushing suffering
 and we come plummeting down
 in the roller coaster of emotion,
 and face the cruel murder of innocent life
 on this the commemoration of the Holy Innocents,
 the first Christian martyrs.

There is no way to deny it.

It happened.
 No way to soften it, it is not a metaphor or an allegory:
 King Herod ordered his soldiers to murder children of Bethlehem.
 And they did.

This is an account we only receive in the Gospel of Matthew.
He alone chose to give it to us.

It seems that Matthew steps over the horror of the story for a moment and points us toward the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Jesus, even as an infant, was foretold by the ancients.
More evidence that He is the One.

He wraps the story in Old Testament shadows and references.

Can we read this story and not recall the time
When an unnamed King of Egypt ordered midwives
To murder all male babies of the Jews;
But Moses was saved in a little ark
When he was found in the bulrushes of the Nile
By Pharaoh's daughter.

Is Matthew reminding us that Jesus is the second Moses and saviour of us all?

There is a shadow of the second Psalm in the story:

“The kings of the earth stand up,
and the rulers take counsel together*
against the Lord and against His Anointed”.

There is an echo of the prophet Hosea:

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him
and called my son out of Egypt.”

Matthew points toward the prophecy of Jeremiah:

“Out of Egypt have I called my Son”

Before he is done, Matthew returns to the agony of the story:

He takes us back 600 years; to Ramah,
A village just north of Jerusalem.
The burial place of Rachel, the wife of Jacob

And mother of Benjamin.

And as the Jews marched from Jerusalem on their way to captivity in Babylon

at the conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BC

They heard the weeping and great mourning from Rachel's grave
As they passed by.

Rachel, mourning the death and the captivity of her children.

Matthew suggests that the weeping and mourning of the mothers and fathers of Bethlehem evoked the memory of Rachel.

Like Rachel, they could not be comforted.

Our first and natural reaction to this story is to Question:

What are we to make of this?

How does it inform our Christian lives?

How could God have let this happen; the violent,
political response to the birth of His son?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

The good news is that God gave us free will.

The bad news is, He gave it to everyone else too.

He gave us free will because

without it there could be no love,

not for each other and not for God.

Love can only exist if we are free to give and to accept it.

We may well be the only one of God's creations to have it
and the only ones with free will.

And so, We are free to choose.

Most of us, recognize and choose to accept the love of God.

Others never seem to see or hear His invitation.

Some of them choose the darkness of evil.

Evil for me is personified and I think of it as an entity,
as Satan, Lucifer, the devil
or any of the other names by which he has been known.

But he is real.

He lacks the power to create anything
So his presence is marked by wanton, mindless destruction.
He can only work through us
and is relentless in his approach.

Whenever good and evil collide in those times, there is suffering.

There are times when the devil tries to mount his assault in proportion to the good that God has given us. At those times it's almost as if Satan sees a last chance to conquer us.

So at the time of the greatest good in mankind's history, God becoming flesh and living among us,
the evil one was there to try to destroy it.
Perhaps in proportion to the great good, The evil took its worst and most violent form
and wrought its worst on the most innocent;
children and babies.

In the collision of good and evil there was enormous suffering.
The scale of which is hard for us to imagine.

There have been other Biblical examples of suffering at the time of the collision of good and evil:
You will remember the suffering of a dreamer named Joseph, who was instrumental in the Jews survival. When they fled from the famine in Canaan, to Egypt where Joseph took them in and fed them.

And there was suffering at the first exodus of the Jews from Egypt as the first born were taken in the plague that freed the Jews from slavery.

And there was suffering as another dreamer named Joseph took Mary and the Christ child and fled to Egypt to escape the evil in Bethlehem.

And there was suffering at the crucifixion of our Lord, almighty suffering at the time of the greatest collision of good and evil.

I heard a priest say one time, that Suffering is the heat that melts us into Christ. It is like the fire that the goldsmith uses to melt the gold so it can be poured into the mold and become a thing of beauty.

And so at times of great good,
there is potential for great evil
and where they collide in our lives,
potential for great suffering.

St Matthew's account of the suffering of Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord, is an important lesson for us.

A lesson perhaps easier to retain as it comes in such great contrast to the joys of Christmas.

A lesson perhaps intended to introduce a dose of hard reality to balance the overwhelming festivity of Christmas in our lives.

The Anglican way of Christianity is all about moderation and balance.

Suffering is not easy for us. It hurts in so many ways. It can cause doubts. We struggle with it, sometimes for months on end, this heat that melts us into Christ.

But in time we get beyond it and live our lives as best we can.
And after a time, if you can take an objective look back, I think
you will find that it was during the bad times
that we turned to God.
That we grew in character
and became closer to Him.
That in the end our faith grew.

Remember how these Bible stories turned out: Jesus escaped
Herod's murderous wrath and a faithful remnant has always
survived the torment by placing their faith in God.

When everything in our lives is going well we tend to drift away
to become wrapped up in ourselves
and forget all about God.

It is when things are not going so well
and we are at wits end,
that we remember and turn to God for help.

It is the suffering, that heat that, in the end, brings closer to Him.

These are tough times for many of us, I know it is for Belinda and
me.

but this is a tough time to be a Christian
and to live a Christian life.
So if you feel that someone is turning up the heat
and things are becoming increasingly difficult,
recognize it for what it is;
the collision of good and evil.

We are God's children and so we have a choice.

But there is only one thing for Christians to do,
give it your best and then turn it over to God.

Even if it occasionally means
that you must endure the heat of suffering.
Let Him melt you
and mold you
into His child that He has in mind for you to be.

Amen.