

Sermon followed by Service - December 28, 2025 - Matthew 2:13-

Do you remember your third grade teacher? My third-grade teacher was Mrs. Sievert. One day she wrote on the chalk board -- "history = his-story," history is God's story. History isn't about what some dead men did; history is what God did and what God does to bless us and save us. Today, our Gospel lesson is a history lesson showing us - God in Control of His-story.

Now Herod didn't like God's story. God's story was putting Jesus at the center of history. Herod thought he should be at the center of Jewish history. So Herod tried to control his story. When he pointed the wise men to Bethlehem, he told them to come back and tell him where Jesus was. He said he wanted to go and worship the child himself. What he really wanted to do was kill Jesus. The wise men didn't know that, but God did know and God had the wise men go home another way. Herod's first plan to control his-story didn't work, so Herod tried another plan to control history. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill every baby boy two years old and younger. He would get Jesus one way or another; one way or another he would control his story.

But Herod couldn't control his-story. God is in control of history. God had warned the wise men not to return to Herod. Now he sent the angel to warn Joseph to escape to Egypt with Jesus and Mary. With God in control, Joseph got the baby Jesus and his mother Mary to safety. Herod could plot and plan; he could give orders and commands. But Herod could not control his-story; God is in control of his-story.

Good reminder for us as we go close out the old and head into the new year. We can make our plans and resolutions, but any plan made without the condition, "the Lord willing" and "Thy will be done," isn't just a plan, it's playing God, claiming control over his-story. Any time I think: "It's my life, I get to do my thing," I'm setting myself and my plan over God and his plan, like Herod tried to do.

We don't like to think of ourselves as "like Herod," do we? But when God sets his plan and promise before us -- "**Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**" -- when Jesus says "put God first and God will take care of everything else," but instead we put ourselves first and figure God should be happy with the left-overs - whose story are we trying to live - God's story or our own story? When it comes to Bible Study and God says: "**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**" and we answer "already know what I need to know" - whose story are we living - God's story or our own story? When God has his thing for us to do, but we can't be bothered because we have our own thing to do - whose story are we living - God's story or our own story? God knows whose story we are living. And he knows whose story he promises to bless.

It's easy to think our story more important than God's story. It's easy think our story would be better than God's story. For example, when we hear of Bethlehem's babies killed, when we see hurt and heartbreak today, it's so easy to think: "How could God let that happen?" It's so easy to second-guess God's love, to second-guess his control, to think that if we were writing the story, our story would be better than God's story. But when we think our story better than God's story, that's thinking like Herod.

As we enter the new year, remember who is in control, whose story it is. When your plans work; when you succeed; when you're happy and healthy, remember why. And when your plans flop; when you fail; when you're sick and miserable, remember who's still in control. Yes, even when the babies of Bethlehem were murdered, God was in control. He drew the line against evil and kept the Christ-child safe. And today God is still drawing his line against evil.

We might not always like where God draws his line. At those times, remember whose story it is - it's God's story. God doesn't control history just to make us happy. The mothers of Bethlehem weren't very happy to see their babies murdered. And I don't suppose Mary and Joseph were too happy to be heading down to Egypt. When God controls history, his first concern isn't how happy our new year will be. God has something more important in mind than just our happiness. Like in our lesson.

When Herod set out to kill Jesus, he was setting out to do more than kill a child. Although he didn't know it, Herod was setting out to destroy God's church. So when God sent Joseph to Egypt with Jesus and his mother, God wasn't just saving one child, he was saving and protecting his whole church, including you and me.

If Herod had succeeded in killing Jesus, the devil would have won. God's Christmas story would have become a horror story. The Child born for us, the Son given for us, our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace would have been dead before he did what he came to do, before he did what we needed him to do. Our Champion would have been defeated before he had a chance to fight for us. The Lamb of God would have been slaughtered and it wouldn't have counted for us. Jesus' death, instead of making peace for us, would have been a complete and horrible tragedy. God would have lost control of his-story and the devil would be in control -- of his story and our story.

Like Herod, we would still be latched and latching on to the devil. Like Herod, we would still be slaves to the sin of this world. Like Herod, we would still be setting ourselves up over God; we would still be claiming control over our life, our story, our world. And like Herod, we would fall out of control into the hands of an angry God.

But God kept control of his-story. In our lesson, we see Satan work his horror, but he couldn't control God's story. God kept Jesus safe. Jesus grew up to be our Champion and our Savior freeing us from the control of sin and Satan. Scan through Jesus' life.

When Satan tried tempting Jesus to choose his own comfort and glory over God's story and glory - whose story and glory did Jesus stick with? When the world tried to pressure Jesus into choosing his own story and glory instead of God's story and glory - whose story and glory did Jesus stick with? Even at the cross, whose story was it there? Who was in control? Even at the cross, Jesus was in control over evil. When the soldiers were pounding the nails into his hands and feet, Jesus overcame evil with good: "Father, forgive them." When the world was mocking him, Jesus kept control in the face of evil. One the thieves crucified with Jesus noticed Jesus' control in the face of evil; he recognized Jesus for who he is - "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus showed his control - "Today you will be with me in paradise." With Jesus in paradise? When would that be? Not until Jesus was ready. Not until Jesus was finished. Then, Jesus gave up his spirit. Up to and including his last breath, Jesus was in control. Even at the cross, it wasn't evil in control; it was Christ in control.

It doesn't always feel that way or look that way, does it? But if we want to see God's control of his-story we don't look in the middle of our story. We look to the "it is finished" of Jesus' story. From dead in the grave, Jesus proved his control and raised himself back to life. No matter how sin, death, and the devil worked their horror, they could not take control of God's story then. And with Jesus, they can not take control of God's story, or your story, today.

When God delivered Jesus from Herod, he was making a statement to the devil and every other enemy of the church, "You can plot and plan; you can lie and kill, but I will keep my people safe." At that same time, he was making his-story clear for you - God's plan for you will not fail; God's promise to you will not be broken; God will control his-story for you. Amen.

Christmas shows us God at work in history. But God doesn't do his work alone. God gives his people parts in his story. God used Joseph to protect his son and protect his church. He used Mary and Joseph to care for Jesus, to raise and teach him. Over the history of the New Testament God has used his people to preach and teach, to baptize and make disciples. And he does the same thing in our lives.

With Christmas control, God brings your story into his story and makes his story to be your story. That's something we get to look forward to this next year - your God has a place for you in his story. He will give you his heart and work through you to show his heart. He will give you his word and work through you to share his word. He will give you his gifts and his money and he will work through you to bless and be a blessing in his church and his world. In the coming year, he will give you his time and his life looking to work in you - here at church, at home, out there in the world. That's right, one of God's great Christmas gifts to us - this coming year, he's looking to work in us for his glory and the good of his people.

That's not a threat – if that's not what you want, you can just give it all back to God and tell him, "No thanks." Instead it's a promise – God had a great place for Mary and Joseph in his-story and God has a great place for you in his-story, too.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by (and filled with?) frenzy, chaos, and a drive for control - people are getting in the way of what I want!

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we observe the Commemoration of the Holy Innocents and are reminded how our God is in control, determined to work his plan to save, even when this world is at its worst.

OPENING HYMN

"Now Sing We, Now Rejoice"

Hymn 363



1 Now sing we, now re - joice, now raise to heav'n our voice;
2 Come from on high to me; I can - not rise to thee.
3 Now through his Son doth shine the Fa-ther's grace di - vine.
4 Oh, where shall joy be found? Where but on heav'n - ly ground,



he from whom joy stream - eth poor in a man - ger lies;
Cheer my wea - ried spir - it, O pure and ho - ly Child;
Death was reign - ing o'er us through sin and van - i - ty
where the an - gels sing - ing with all his saints u - nite,



not so bright - ly beam - eth the sun in yon - der skies.
thro' thy grace and mer - it, blest Je - sus, Lord most mild,
till he o - pened for us a bright e - ter - ni - ty.
sweet - est prais - es bring - ing in heav'n - ly joy and light.



Thou my Sav - ior art!	Thou my Sav - ior art!
draw me un - to thee!	Draw me un - to thee!
May we praise him there!	May we praise him there!
Oh, that we were there!	Oh, that we were there!

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

P We confess our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Almighty Lord God, we have gathered today to thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior. We need a Savior, for we have sinned greatly against you. But your mercies never end; they are new to us every day. So at your command and promise, we ask you to forgive us.

C **O holy and most merciful Father, I am altogether sinful from birth.**

In

countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called

your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: God, have mercy on me a sinner!

P I bring you good news of great joy! A Savior has been born for you!

Jesus

has destroyed the work of the devil; he has set you free to live with God. He has done what we couldn't do - he has made us right with God! Through Jesus you are forgiven and saved to be God's child. Glory to God in the highest!

C **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

P In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

HYMN

"Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising"

Hymn 362 (vs. 1-4, 6)



1 Come, your hearts and voic - es rais - ing, Christ the
2 Christ, from heav'n to us de - scend - ing and in
3 Ja - cob's Star in all its splen - dor beams with
4 From the bond - age that op - pressed us, from sin's



Lord with glad - ness prais - ing; loud - ly sing his
 love our race be - friend - ing, in our need his
 com - fort sweet and ten - der, forc - ing Sa - tan
 fet - ters that pos - sessed us, from the grief that



love a - maz - ing, wor - thy folk of Christ - en - dom.
 help ex - tend - ing, saved us from the wi - ly foe.
 to sur - ren - der, break - ing all the pow'rs of hell.
 sore dis - tressed us, we, the cap - tives, now are free.

Oh, the joy beyond expressing
 when by faith we grasp this blessing,
 when, O Christ, we come addressing
 thanks to you and highest praise!

Gracious Child, in mercy hear us,
 from your lowly manger cheer us,
 gently lead us and be near us
 till we join th' angelic choir.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, the martyred innocents of Bethlehem showed forth your praise not by speaking but by dying. Put to death in us all that is in conflict with your will that our lives may bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Jeremiah 31:15–17a

This is what the LORD says:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,
 mourning and great weeping,
 Rachel weeping for her children

and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

This is what the LORD says:

“Restrain your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for your work will be rewarded,”
declares the LORD.

“They will return from the land of the enemy.
So there is hope for your descendants,”
declares the LORD.

“Your children will return to their own land.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

“Peace Came to Earth”

Hymn 330



1 Peace came to earth at last that cho-sen night when an - gels
2 And who could be the same for hav - ing held the in - fant
3 You show the Fa - ther none has ev - er seen, in flesh and
4 How else could I have known you, O my God! How else could



clove the sky with song and light and God em - bod - ied
in their arms and lat - er felt the wound - ed hands and
blood you bore our griefs and pain, in bread and wine you
I have loved you, O my God! How else could I em -



love and sheathed his might— Who could but gasp: Im - man - u - el!
side, all doubts dis - pelled— Who could but sigh: Im - man - u - el!
vis - it us a - gain— Who could but see: Im - man - u - el!
brace you, O my God! Who could but pray: Im - man - u - el!



Who could but sing: Im - man - u - el!
 Who could but shout: Im - man - u - el!
 Who could but thrill: Im - man - u - el!
 Who could but praise: Im - man - u - el!

SECOND READING

1 Peter 4:12-19

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And,

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
 what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

“To Shepherds as They Watched by Night”

Hymn 335 (vs 2-6)



1 To shep - herds as they watched by night ap - peared a
 2 “At Beth - le - hem, in Da - vid’s town, as Mi - cah
 3 O then re - jice that through his Son God is with
 4 What harm can sin and death then do? The true God



host of an - gels bright; "Be - hold the ten - der
 did of old make known. It is the Christ, your
 sin - ners now at one; made like your - selves of
 now a - bides with you. Let hell and Sa - tan



babe," they said, "in yon - der low - ly man - ger laid,
 Lord and King, who will to all sal - va - tion bring."
 flesh and blood, your broth - er is th'e - ter - nal God.
 storm and rave, Christ is your broth - er— you are safe.

Not one he will or can forsake;
 his promise he will never break.
 Let ev'ry scheme the tempter try,
 you may his utmost pow'rs defy.

You shall and must at last prevail;
 God's own you are, you cannot fail.
 To God forever sing your praise
 with joy and patience all your days.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Psalm 116:15

Alleluia.
 Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his faithful servants.
 Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Matthew 2:13–23

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, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,**

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried.
 He descended into hell.
 The third day he rose again from the dead.
 He ascended into heaven
 and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
 From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy Christian Church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN

“All Hail! You Infant Martyr Flowers”

Hymn 978



1 All hail! You in - fant mar - tyr flow'rs, cut off in
 2 With ter - ror does the ty - rant hear that God's own
 3 King Her - od ra - ges at the Word: "Go, sol - dier,
 4 Oh, what is gained from this of - fense? What prof - it



life's first dawn - ing hours; like rose - buds, snapped in
 Son to us draws near. On Da - vid's throne he
 with your ruth - less sword, to him, who stands where
 comes from vi - o - lence? The Sav - ior - King sur -



dread - ful strife, when Her - od sought our Sav - ior's life.
 comes to dwell and reign as King of Is - ra - el.
 we have stood, and stain the In - fant - crib with blood!"
 vived the day, as Christ was safe - ly whisked a - way!

A voice is heard in bitter pain
 as Rachel mourns the infants slain,
 refusing comfort—sacred lore—
 because her children are no more!

Of you, O little lambs, we sing,
first victims slain for Christ our King:
beneath the heav'nly altar's ray
with martyr-palms and crowns you play!

To you, the virgin-born, we raise
thanksgiving and eternal praise,
whom with the Father we adore
and Holy Spirit evermore.

SERMON

Matthew 2:13-23

OFFERING HYMN

"I Stand Beside Your Manger Here"
Hymn 334 (vs 1,2,4)

I stand beside your manger here,
O Jesus, life from heaven.
The gifts I bring as I draw near
are what to me you've given:
my spirit, courage, mind, and heart—
take all I am, take ev'ry part;
in mercy let it please you.

Before I ever came to be,
or knew of you, my Savior,
you'd chosen me, been born for me,
that I might have your favor.
Before you formed me by your hand
in grace you had already planned
how I would learn to love you.

One thing I hope; my Savior, hear;
bestow on me this blessing,
that I may ever hold you near,
you as my own possessing.

So let my heart your manger be;
come, holy Child, lie down in me
with all your joyful treasures.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Brief intercessory prayers may be added in a fitting place.

Almighty God and Father, we thank you for all your mercies, especially for the gift of your Son, through whom you have revealed your gracious will. We praise you for the Holy Spirit and his working through the means of grace.

Plant your Word in our hearts, and cause it to produce fruit in our lives.

Strengthen and defend your Church, that by your Word and sacraments faith may grow and love toward all may increase.

Support all who spread the light of your truth throughout the world.

Keep our children in the grace of their baptisms. Enable their parents to train them in lives of faith.

Raise up Christians to serve you in the ministry of the Word and in all godly walks of life.

Preserve our nation in justice and honor. Guide and bless all who make, administer, and judge our laws.

Give them wisdom that they may promote justice and hinder evil.

Let your blessing rest on planting and harvest, commerce and industry, medicine and science, the arts and culture. Protect all who travel, and care for those whose work is difficult or dangerous.

Be with all who devote themselves to any useful task.

Comfort all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity, [especially . . . here name the person and the cause of the petition]. Remember those who suffer persecution for the faith. Have mercy on those for whom death draws near.

Grant them your love, and take them into your tender care.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

We remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served you, who now rest from their labors, [especially . . . here name the person]. Console those who are mourning or living with sadness.

Keep us in the true faith, and bring us at last to the joys of heaven.

Grant us these things, Father, for the sake of Jesus, who died and rose again. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"O Rejoice, All Christians Loudly"

Hymn 366



1 O re - jice, all Chris - tians, loud - ly, for our joy has
 2 See, my soul, your Sav - ior choos - es pov - er - ty and
 3 Lord, how shall I thank you right - ly? I am saved e -
 4 Je - sus, guard and guide your mem - bers, fill them with your



now be - gun; won - drous things our God has done.
 weak - ness, too; in such love he comes to you.
 ter - nal - ly by your life and death for me.
 bound - less grace, hear their prayers in ev - 'ry place.



Tell a - broad his good - ness proud - ly, who our race has
 Nei - ther crib nor cross re - fus - es, all he suf - fers
 Let me not for - get it light - ly, but with all my
 Fan to life faith's glow - ing em - bers; grant all Chris - tians



hon - ored thus, that he has be - friend - ed us.
 for your good to re - deem you by his blood.
 heart be - lieve that from you I shall re - ceive
 far and near ho - ly peace, a glad new year.

Refrain



Joy, O joy, be - yond all glad - ness! Christ has done a -



way with sad - ness! Hence, all sor - row and re - pin - ing,



for the Sun of grace is shin - ing!

Acknowledgments Created by Christian Worship: Service Builder © 2024 Used by permission: OneLicense no. 712373 Software distributed in partnership with Northwestern Publishing House. Created by Christian Worship: CCLI Copyright License 11194382, Size A and Streaming License CSPL059933, Size A Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. **Setting Two from Christian Worship Holy, Holy, Holy** Tune: © 1984, 1985 GIA Publications, Inc. **Jesus, Lamb of God** Tune: © 1984, 1985 GIA Publications, Inc. **Preface** Tune: © 1984, 1985, 2010 GIA Publications, Inc. **Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising** Text: © 1941 Concordia Publishing House. **The Boyhood of Christ** Text: © 1986 The Canterbury Press Norwich. Tune: © 1975 Oxford University Press. **Let All Together Praise Our God** Text (st. 4): © 1969 Concordia Publishing House. **A Cradle in Bethlehem** Copyright © 1952 Sony/ATV Tunes LLC