

The Forgotten Children of Christmas

By Pastor Francis Williams

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he ascertained from the magi. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’” (Matthew 2:16-18).

Christmas is a time to celebrate the good news of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is good news because in the birth of Jesus God has given us hope, joy, peace and love.

Associated with the joyful news of the birth of the Child Jesus, however, is the sad account of the execution of the male children in Bethlehem. Upon hearing of the birth of the King of the Jews - a threat to his rule and the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy - Herod ordered the execution of all the male children in Bethlehem, two years old and younger. I label these children, “The forgotten Children of Christmas.”

The Feast of the Holy Innocents, also called Childermas or Innocents’ Day, is a Christian feast in remembrance of the massacre of these children. It is observed by Western Churches on December 28 and in the Eastern churches on December 29. Some consider Holy Innocents’ Day the unluckiest day of the year. Legend says that when Edward IV of England learned that the Sunday set for his coronation was also Holy Innocents’ Day, he moved the ceremony to Monday in order not to start his official reign in that unhappy day.

Why then does Matthew include this sorrowful event in his account of the birth of Jesus? He specifically states that this incident was the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (see Jer. 31:15). But some may ask, why did God allow these innocent children to be massacred by the notorious king Herod? Why didn’t God protect these children just as He protected Mary and Joseph’s Son? These are hard questions which can only be resolved by trusting in the wisdom of God. As difficult as it may be to absorb, what we know for sure is that the massacre of the infant boys is of the will of God.

As we celebrate Christmas with family and friends, let us be thankful for all the blessings God has given to us. Above all, let us be thankful for the Savior who came to give us hope, joy, peace and love. Let us also remember that there are many people throughout the world, in our country, in our neighborhoods and even in our families who are filled with sorrow and sadness this joyous time. This Christmas and all times, let us be vessels of God’s grace, peace, joy and hope to all those who are hurting. As we worship our LORD Jesus Christ, let us also whisper a prayer for those who are weeping.

Merry Christmas to everyone!

HYMN: Christians, Awake (John Byrom, 1745)

1. Christians, awake, salute the happy morn
Whereon the Savior of the world was born;
Rise to adore the mystery of love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above;
With them the joyful tidings first begun
Of God incarnate and the virgin's Son.
2. Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
Who heard th' angelic herald's voice, "Behold,
I bring good tidings of a Savior's birth
To you and all the nations of the earth;
This day hath God fulfilled His promised Word;
This day is born a Savior, Christ the Lord."
3. He spoke, and straightway the celestial choir
In hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire;
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
And heav'n's whole orb with alleluias rang;
God's highest glory was their anthem still,
Peace on the earth, and unto men good will.
4. To Bethlehem the happy shepherds sought,
To see the wonder God for us had wrought,
And found, with Joseph and the blessed maid,
Her Son, the Savior, in a manger laid;
Amazed, the wondrous story they proclaim,
The earliest heralds of the Savior's name.
5. Let us, like these good shepherds, then employ
Our grateful voices to proclaim the joy;
Trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our loss,
From His poor manger to His bitter cross,
Tread in His steps, assisted by His grace,
Till our first heav'nly state again takes place.
6. Then may we hope, th' angelic hosts among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
He that was born upon this joyful day
Around us all His glory shall display;
Saved by His love, incessantly we sing
Eternal praise to heav'n's almighty King.

Listen to this hymn on YouTube at:

<https://youtu.be/Xe6G88ay3fl?list=PLaCEglVntCgqQOFVED6kO13mgQ1nyaWn6>