

# The Sunday following Christmas

## 27 December 2020

The Eve of the Commemoration of  
The Holy Innocents

**Grace Episcopal Church**  
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Honesdale, PA

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**The Sunday following Christmas, 2020**  
*Virtual Grace*

Organ Prelude -

*“Lully, lullay, thou little tiny child”*

The Coventry Carol  
setting Lloyd Webber

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Hello and welcome to “Virtual Grace”  
from Grace Episcopal Church in Honesdale, PA,  
as we continue to celebrate the story of Christ’s birth.  
Today, we will follow the story of the ‘after,’  
skipping a little ahead with the story in Matthew’s account  
of the Holy Innocents (who are commemorated on Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>)  
and often a forgotten scene in the drama.  
I’m Fr. Ed, the rector of our parish, and we’re glad to have you join us  
as we will continue to offer broadcasts of “Virtual Grace,”  
not knowing when our doors will be open again for in-person worship  
and the offering of the Blessed Sacraments.

You may still access on YouTube and FaceBook our special service  
of Christmas Lessons & Carols.

Your continued donations to the ministry and mission  
of Grace Church in these turbulent times, have been deeply appreciated.  
We know so many people are struggling - financially, socially, personally,  
especially in this holiday season.  
It is our mission to aid any and everyone in whatever way we can,  
to spread the Good News of Salvation  
in whatever situation someone may find themselves.  
We appreciate all the help, donations, best wishes and prayers  
that have been offered to the Church.

If you, or anyone you know, are in any pastoral need at all, call me, 24/7.  
I am more than ready to come to your spiritual aid and visit you -  
sadly, still with a mask!

Now, let us join our hearts and souls in praise to God,  
knowing that our salvation lies only in our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
in this life and in the world to come.

## CONFESSION & ASSURANCE of PARDON

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.  
But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins  
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*1 John 1:8,9*

Let us confess our sins against God and our fellow sisters and brothers.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive our sins through our savior Jesus  
Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen us in all goodness, ✝ and  
keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Hear now words from the prophet Jeremiah.

### FIRST READING

*Jeremiah 31:15-19*

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is  
weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more. Thus says the LORD: Keep your voice from  
weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says  
the LORD: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope  
for your future, says the LORD: your children shall come back to their own  
country.

Indeed I heard Ephraim pleading: "You disciplined me, and I took the  
discipline; I was like a calf untrained. Bring me back, let me come back, for  
you are the LORD my God. For after I had turned away I repented; and after  
I was discovered, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was dismayed  
because I bore the disgrace of my youth."

Here ends the Reading.

- 1 If the Lord had not been on our side, \*  
 let Israel now say;
- 2 If the Lord had not been on our side, \*  
 when enemies rose up against us;
- 3 Then would they have swallowed us up alive \*  
 in their fierce anger toward us;
- 4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us \*  
 and the torrent gone over us;
- 5 Then would the raging waters \*  
 have gone right over us.
- 6 Blessed be the Lord! \*  
 he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
- 7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; \*  
 the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the Name of the Lord, \*  
 the maker of heaven and earth.

## SECOND READING

*Matthew 2:13-18*

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Here ends the Reading.

MEDITATION

*“The DEATH of INNOCENCE”*

Three women come on stage, and stand at the stable fence

as Joseph leads the Mother and Child under the cover of night.

One may have been the midwife, one the nurse maid,

and the third an observer - perhaps the wife of a shepherd, or the inn-keeper.

“Lully, lullay, thou little tiny child.”

The song they sing as the Holy Family heads to safety from the authorities.

“By by, lully, lullay.”

This carol a part of a Renaissance mystery play from Coventry, England.

The shepherds and magi have left the stage.

All is quiet, the day after the birth and rest has fallen on the Holy Family.

Joseph, asleep, receives another dream of the angel, this time with a warning:

“Take the Child and leave this place quickly and secretly.

The King will kill the boy if you stay,

and all the little children in Judea.

Leave the country now and head to Egypt.

I will come a third time and tell you when it is safe to return.”

Joseph thus packs up their meagre belongings,

loads the Mother and the Child on the donkey,

wrapped in blankets to mask them,

and secrets away down the road.

The census is over and all will head back home.

They will go unnoticed.

Humbly, quietly they leave the safety of the manger -

is this why they were secreted away in the manger -

so Herod’s soldiers wouldn’t find them?

One wonders if this part of God's protection was planned before it all began?

The oxen and ass and doves in the rafters left behind in the manger  
as three women who helped with the birthing stand at the gate  
and sing a song of lament:

*O sisters too, how may we do for to preserve this day?  
This poor youngling, for whom we do sing,  
By by, lully, lullay.*

*Herod, the King in his raging chargéd he hath this day  
his men of might in his own sight  
all young children to slay.*

It is not the Child Jesus for whom they sing,  
it is the loss of their own children.

Recalling the words of the prophet we heard in our first Reading”

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

The tiny child is their own son.

*That woe is me, poor child for thee! And ever morn and day,  
for thy parting neither say or sing,  
by by, lully, lullay.*

Eugene Boring tells this sad story:

“Susanna and Jehoiachim were young parents, both twenty-three years old, just getting started in life together. They had one child, little Davey, who at eighteen months had learned to walk and was getting into everything, was putting sentences together in strange ways, his soft, high-pitched little voice giving a musical lilt even to the Aramaic gutturals. A healthy, happy child, he was the delight of their life. They named him David because they lived in the “city of David,” as thei village was called, located a few miles south of Jerusalem.

Late one night when everyone was sleeping, the king's soldiers

surrounded the village, and at first light they came into the town. They ordered all parents with small children into the village square, made a search to ensure that none remained, and without a word killed every boy younger than two years old...

Take your mind to any village in Kenya, Afghanistan, anywhere in the world today.

Boring continues,

“Jehoiachim and Susanna were able to pick up the pieces of their life and go on...

Until one day when they discovered that on the crucial night before the slaughter of the baby boys an angel had come from God to warn one family to flee. It turns out that God had arranged for Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus to escape and that they had been secure in Egypt. The little boy Jesus was alive and well, but not their little Davey.”

*New Interpreter's Bible, vol. VIII., p. 148*

The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible notes, that

we should remember that the birth of Christ,

"brings with it not only heavenly promise

but also violence and rejection."

*NIDB vol. 3, pg. 46*

The sin of earth versus the salvation from heaven.

How many were killed at Herod's hand - dozens? hundreds?

Nobody knows. But it doesn't matter.

What matters is the slaughter of innocence.

There are those in the Church who think that we should not include these lessons in our Church's readings and teachings.

The commemoration of the Holy Innocents is offered each on December 28<sup>th</sup> - pushed off the Nativity story to a midweek observance.

We may remember that Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt hiding until Herod himself was dead.

But do we remember why?

Do we remember all those innocents who died even this year of the pandemic?  
Or will their names be forgotten in history.

I will tell you there is no historical data confirming the story of the Holy Innocents.  
Only the Church records the story - and why?

Christianity celebrates a God who comes into the horrors of our life,  
and tells stories that affirm that truth.

Why *would* God choose to come on the darkest and coldest night of the year?  
But as a glimmering light and warmth of one little candle - a Holy Child.

A more familiar carol we sang the other day, *O little town of Bethlehem*:

"Where children pure and happy pray to the blessed Child,  
where misery cries out to thee the Son of the mother mild;  
where charity stands watching and faith holds wide the door,  
the dark night wakes, the glory breaks,  
the Christ-child comes once more."

*Hymnal 1982 #78/79 st.4*

Why *did* God come to be born into such a world?

Simply because we *need* him to - and *He* needs to.

I could even think that God needs us to need Him to come into this world of ours.

Over and over again, once more, and once more again.

We need to remember that God cares for the children - all the children.

Is that why 30 years later, Jesus chides the Disciples who wish to shoo them away.

The children ran to Jesus to kneel before him, pray with him

and have his hands laid upon them in blessing.

"It is to these children," Jesus teaches us, "that the kingdom of Heaven belongs."

And how does Christ break into that darkness and coldness?

The dark night *will* wake, the glory break,  
and the Christ *will* come once more.                      AMEN.



Let us offer the words of our faith using the Apostles' Creed.

The CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection ☩ of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS, Form II, *adapted*

BCP, p.385

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Justin, the Archbishop of Canterbury; Michael, our Presiding Bishop; Kevin, our Bishop; and for all ministers and faithful. Pray for the Church.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace at home and abroad.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, those in prison, those separated from loved ones, for the sick, and especially the elderly and those suffering from Covid-19 symptoms. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

*Silence*

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially those who have succumbed to the virus, and those killed by violent acts. Remember the Holy Innocents. Pray for those who have died.

*Silence*

I ask your thanksgiving for loved ones, and the creative ways they and we have found to share our love. Pray for our families wherever they may be.

*Silence*

To sum up all these petitions, let us pray together in the words which Christ himself taught us, saying:

Our Father...

We remember, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*BLESSING*

The Lord bless us and keep us  
The Lord make his face to shine upon us,  
and be gracious to us.  
The Lord lift his countenance upon us, and give us peace. *Amen.*

In our various ways, let us go forth and proclaim to the world the love of God as has been made known to us. Alleluia, alleluia!

Organ Postlude -

*“Unto us a child is born”*

Hymnal 1982 #92

*Puer nobis nascitur* (1582), setting by Geoffrey Shaw