

“Christ is Your Life”

Matthew 2:13-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is a day of sadness, despair, hope, and joy all wrapped up into one service. We honor the innocent children martyred by the evil Herod, and we celebrate the life that God has breathed into us as His dear children. Some may look at this and think how can you possibly honor those who died such unjust deaths and also celebrate life? It does seem somewhat contradictory on the surface, but only if this life is the end. We all must stare down the barrel of death's gun, and because of our sin it will claim every person. For some that will come sooner than others, but we all face the same fate, and it is a fate that we deserve.

Even for us Christians, it is easy to look at our Gospel account and see nothing but hopelessness, despair, and grief. The death of a child is indeed a horrific thing, and one that many have to bear through this life. And just like Jeremiah records in our Old Testament lesson, there is inconsolable weeping, seeking to understand why God would allow this to happen to such an innocent child. For the mothers, fathers, and siblings of Bethlehem and the surrounding region, there certainly were many cries of “why?”. But hope is not lost, even when all hope seems to have disappeared behind the grief. For even in death, there is life—the life that Christ has given to His people. And for those who have faith in Him and the salvation He has wrought, it is Christ who is your life. Only He can console the broken-hearted, like Rachel weeping for her children.

This brings a stark reality into focus. Paul says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death,” and indeed, all are sinful. Sin permeates everything in your lives, and the lives of your seemingly innocent children. No matter the joy that is brought to us by them, they are not innocent the same way you are not innocent. All people bear the stain of sin, and thus bear the burden of its consequence which is death. So many live their lives without the thought of consequences. They allow sin to pervade and rule their lives because it is what makes them feel good. Sin rules the lives of the people living in the flesh and for those people all that awaits them is death. No hope. No joy. Only despair.

But that's the way they want it, right? If they admit that without Christ their lives have no value, then it makes it all that much harder to do the things they want to do. They can't admit that the gift of life is a treasure because then they couldn't be their own version of Herod and kill their babies. They couldn't look at the old man in the hospital suffering from a terminal illness and acknowledge his witness in the struggle he

perseveres through, because it's just easier to slip him a drug cocktail and send him off to the grave. The sinful world has taken life and made it meaningless because they do not have true life within themselves. Without Christ everything is empty, and the only thing that awaits is death. If that's all that awaits then who cares when it happens.

That's the evil of Satan on full display, working with all his might to upend God's salvific plan for his people by just eliminating as many people as he can. That's what he did with Herod, and that's what he still is doing today. But just like Herod, he fails time and again. Abortion and euthanasia are horrific tools of the evil one in his attempt to destroy God's people, and will continue to be fights that the Christian will have to battle with him and his minions over. The fallen world in which we live sees convenience over care for what God has given life. But even those deaths are not the end.

Our Gospel lesson brings with it the truth that Jesus was not among those children who were killed. The devil once again does not win. For where everyone sees nothing but death, Jesus Christ is alive, and He lives for you. He lives for all those who have faced the trials of this life, to bring the sorrow and grief that you bear to nothing before Him. As His dear children, death cannot touch you. Satan's grasp hits nothing but air when he reaches out for you because you dwell in the arms of your loving Savior. The world lives without hope because it is lost in sin, but you live in the hope of Jesus who has died the death you deserve on the cross of salvation.

Because Jesus' death brings the reality that death is no longer a great power. He has defeated it by His blood, and has upended it by His resurrection. And so, you live as those who have been redeemed by His sacrifice, not as those who have nothing to hope for in this life. You are as Paul says in Romans 6:11, because you are baptized children of the Most High, you are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." You now live a new life, one that is filled with the Spirit of God because Christ now dwells in you. You are a member of the body of Christ, and He gives new life to all who believe in Him, welcoming them into His presence through the blessed waters of the sacrament of baptism.

There is hope for you because even in the face of certain death, Jesus' death brings life. And that is why "in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)." Having the hope of life in Christ, both now and in the life to come, does not mean that you will not still have to suffer the consequences of sin in the world. There will still be grief, pain, tears, and sometimes seemingly unbearable anguish. But as one who has Christ in your very being, all of those terrible things have been taken by Him to the cross to undo the power that they hold over you. He has borne your griefs and carried your

sorrows (Is. 63:4) as He brought salvation to you and all who believe. He lived a perfect life so that you would stand before His Father as one who is blameless, fulfilling the Law that you could not. He died your death so that you would not have to bear the penalty of sin and live an eternal life of grief and sorrow in the lake of fire.

But it doesn't end there. His death is not the end. Just as He escaped the death that the devil used Herod to bring about, He escaped the death that the devil thought was his victory. He broke the bonds of death and shattered the power it held over His people. Death could not hold Him, and because He dwells in you, it cannot hold you or your loved ones who have died in the faith. They do not wait in death, nor will you if your physical death comes before the Lord's return. You wait for the resurrection in life, the eternal life of the glory of Jesus who has given Himself as the perfect Lamb of sacrifice and now rules on the throne in heaven, the throne surrounded by the great multitude of saints worshiping the Lamb who was slain.

And very shortly, you will join that heavenly host in the feast of the Lamb as you receive the foretaste of the true feast to come. That is why you need "not grieve as others do who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13), because you can always find the ones you love here at the Lord's table. Heaven is opened and you share in the feast of the body and blood of the one who is your life. He feeds you His life-giving body and gives you the cup of His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. The thing that ties you to death is wiped away in the presence of all those who have attained the perfection of heaven. All those whose names are written in the Book of Life are here, partaking of His Holy Supper and receiving His gift of life which only comes from Him.

Evil Herod brought death and destruction to the families under his rule with his heinous action to kill all the innocents in his pursuit of keeping power. Satan lurks in every corner, using every aspect of this world to try and upend the salvific plan of God, but every single time, he fails. And he fails because of Jesus. Because of the life He lived, the death He died, and the eternal life that He has given to you as a gift, the seeming hopelessness of this life is not the end. Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated by His vicarious death on the cross, and as those who have been baptized into His death, we have the promise of eternity, dwelling with Him in His Father's house.

Today, we celebrate life. Those young children who had that gift ripped away from them and died as those who believed in the Messiah, now have life by faith in the light of the glory of God. Just the same as every baby of Christian parents that wasn't given the chance of life outside the womb, every young one who was called home according to God's plan, and every parent, friend, grandparent, or family member who

died in the faith now has life around the throne of Christ, you look forward to that same life. Even in the face of death, you have that hope, which is yours as a dear child of God. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18).” And it has been revealed to you in Christ. Christ is your life—the eternal source of life for His sheep.

You will follow the Lamb into eternal bliss, to be together with the whole host of heaven among whom your loved ones now dwell. And to enter that glory is not death. It is life. It is life because Jesus has declared you to be His, and “[He] will never leave you, nor forsake you (Heb 13:5).” Our Old Testament lesson in Jeremiah 31:17 says, “There is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country.” The bliss of heaven is theirs already, and together with all the saints, we proclaim the glory of Him who has given life to the world, and will be the life of the world for all when we are reunited with them in the eternal life that awaits us on the last day. Until then we join together with them in the hymn of all creation. “Power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and blessing and glory are His. This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia.” Christ has defeated death, and He is now and will always be your life. Amen.