Text: Matthew 2:13-23

**Introduction**

I’ve never been a “New Year’s” guy. So, if you’ve made some resolutions, I wish you well with them. But New Year’s American Style has always been against my deepest theological convictions. It tends to be about law and not the gospel. Whether that law is those self-imposed resolutions or the new budget quotas, the thrill of the clean slate is often quickly sullied by not living up to hopes. And even that clean slate feels like a fake gospel. Absolution without repentance and the indwelling Spirit that might empower change. All the autopays are still there…

Now the one thing I would say about New Years is that it desperately needs a good hymn or carol. Auld Lang Syne, is the only one that has really stuck. And it isn’t really in English. But it does get a better sense of how I’d think about New Years. “We’ll drink a cup of kindness yet, for the sake of auld lang syne.” Yes, we remember where we have come from. We look forward to where we might be going. But we are going to do it with kindness to ourselves and each other. Because all of out plans eventually shall go the way of all plans – long long since, auld lang syne. And it isn’t the final score that matters, but the kindness we grant each other. But if you can write The New Year’s Hymn, I can guarantee you a place in every hymnal published.

**Text**

On the church calendar this is the 1st Sunday in the 12 day short season of Christmas. Some years you might get a second Sunday, but not this year. And the text for this Sunday is always one of the hardest texts in the scriptures.

We normally think of Christmas as a season of good cheer. The Scandinavian term hygge – comfortable conviviality, wellness and contentment – could wrap the season in a giant down blanket. That’s the spirit of all the secular songs that have been on the radio from 3 PM Thanksgiving until 3PM Christmas day. Whether it was rocking around the Christmas Tree or all I want for Christmas is you: every need is met, every longing satisfied and a smile on every face. The set-up for White Christmas never gets recorded, which is Irving Berlin stuck in LA where orange and palm trees sway. Even Blue Christmas, is usually done in camp, with a knowing smile that yes it would be blue without you, but I won’t be. Because I’m Elvis, Thank you.

But if you turn toward the sacred, you start finding a something sharper. Myrrh is mine it’s bitter perfume. I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play…There is no peace on earth I said For hate is strong and mocks the song…. Why lies he in such mean estate, where ox and ass are keeping? This child did not come to institute universal hygge or mere good cheer. He came for peace on earth. The child did not come to lower god to men, but to take humanity into God. The child did not come to erase Israel, but to fulfill it. What once went wrong, would be made right in this one.

But peace requires a treaty. It either requires enough strength to sue for it, or it require unconditional surrender. The path to God is still a path of holiness, because God remains holy. And all of this requires sacrifice, or at least a sacrifice. The way god works is by death and resurrection. God kills to make alive. The death is often seen or felt. The resurrection we take on faith with the one example of Jesus.

I’m usually reminded by a Roman Catholic friend of mine of the saint days that come right after Christmas. He tells me they are called the *Comites Christi* – the Companions of Christ. St. Stephen, the first martyr. (Good King Wenceslas Looked Out on the Feast of Stephern…) St. John, the exile of Patmos. And The Holy Innocents. The companions of Christ are all martyrs in word or deed or both. Stephen the first martyr in both word and deed. John who would die a natural death, but gave his life to the Word. And the Innocents, who were too young to assent in word, yet were martyrs in deed.

**Christology**

Our text today is always tough because it doesn’t seem right. It doesn’t seem right even to those writing the story. “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentations, Rachel weeping for her children, she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Why would the birth of messiah necessitate the deaths of the innocent? Why would there be martyrs in deed, but not word?

The entire story is about Herod. And Herod is about the lengths the world will go to in order to keep its power. And part of keeping its power is keeping those who are enslaved by it. And so Herod, worried about rumors of a potential king, thinks nothing of killing every male child under two in the region. Better safe than sorry. And the outcry will testify to they next people who might be looking for another King to think again.

And sometimes we might be in the mood of Longfellow – the poet behind I heard the bells on Christmas Day. Who had lost his wife, burned while sealing envelopes. And nursing a son likely to die from wounds suffered in the Civil War then raging. Maybe those angels on Christmas day lied. Or this God isn’t strong enough. Sometimes we might join Rachel weeping.

But the story is deeper. The promise is all in Christ. “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” The Father shepherds the Holy Family through Egypt and back. And it is not because they are fortunes favorites. It is simply because their time has not yet arrived. As Simeon had prophesied, “the swords would pierce Mary’s heart.” And this child today, would lay down his life as the sacrifice for all. His course started at the urging of his mother at Cana.

**Moral**

Egypt is the land of slavery. And God has called his son out of Egypt. He called Israel out of Egypt in the exodus. He called Jesus out of Egypt. And he calls each and every one of his – the companions of Christ – out of Egypt. We have been called out of the land of slavery.

And the Herod’s are going to try their best to make us stay. They will kill what they must. They want us to refuse to be comforted. To be without hope. That the justice of God never comes. That our children or loved ones are no more.

But God works by killing and making alive. And He did not spare his own son. It is in Christ’s death and resurrection that we have the right to be called the children of God. As John of Patmos began His gospel.

**Eschatological**

And one day we will hear the words, “Rise…those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

Because when Christ returns, the Herod’s will all be cast down. And even death will be no more.

Because unlike Rachel, Christ says blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Because unlike what Rachel believed, that the children are no more, The Father remembers. They are engraved on the palm of his hand. We might forget names and faces, but the Father does not.

Take comfort from the companions of Christ who testified with their lives to the truth.

Then hear the bells more loud and deep

God is not dead, nor does He sleep

The wrong shall fail, the right prevail

With peace on earth, good will to men

The devil, the world and death fight on a little longer. But Christ has won our peace. And He is our companion. You have been called out of Egypt and will be made alive.

Amen