

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen

The Second Sunday after Christmas (2021)

God Saves His Children

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“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”” (Matthew 2:17–18, ESV)

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Luther explains that *“The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.”* God’s Will, will be done but too often we forget this truth, especially in times of tragedy or sorrow. Such were the mothers crying for their children who were murdered by the command of an evil man, King Herod as he sought to kill the Christ child. He who the wise men called, King of the Jews.

This tragedy seems so senseless to us. Some might even be thinking, I don’t see how I can be uplifted by this Gospel Reading. Therefore, they ask, “What does this tragic tale have to offer a Christian after the joy of Christmas? It offers us a reminder of the hatred Satan has for God’s only begotten Son. Herod was outraged thinking another could rest the throne from him, and Satan is outraged thinking he, rather than the Christ child, should be the favored one of God, Thus, Satan led Herod to commit this horrible act of murder against innocent babes in Bethlehem.

Our Lord Jesus is born in the little city of Bethlehem, but Satan would not have the joyous event of our Lord’s birth be remembered in this town, but rather he willed that the slaughter of innocents should be the history of Bethlehem. Herod, beguiled by Satan is satisfied, believing the child who is born King of Jews is among the innocents he had killed. Yet, in the midst of this tragedy God’s Will is still done, for He saves His only begotten Son that He may grow into manhood and save all mankind. God’s Will is to *Save His Children* through the death of another and the slaughter of innocents will not stop that.

God’s Will is good and gracious. He willed the creation of man, and nothing was too good for the man He created. God placed him in paradise, the Garden of Eden. He willed that man should live in a perfect, loving relationship with Him. But like the slaughter of innocents, Satan led man to rebel and sin against God, bringing death into paradise. But this act of evil would not thwart God’s Will, His Will would prevail as He willed that sinful man should be redeemed, be led to repentance, and be forgiven to live once again in Paradise, but not the old Paradise but a new one, the new heaven and earth. God’s Will is fulfilled in His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The Redeemer of mankind, the Word become flesh. God Wiled that He should become man to ransom man from sin, and God’s Will is done.

Thus, from the beginning, God’s Will, was to *Save His Children*, both Israel and the Gentile nations, for they too are to be counted among His Children. He Willed that His Son would come into the world, assuming the flesh of man, saving man from sin, death, and the devil. It is not God’s Will that any should perish. Holy Scripture makes this clear through the words of St. Paul, God ***“desires [that] all people . . . be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV) and through the prophet Ezekiel, through whom God said He has ***“no***

pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11, ESV)

So yes, all this is God’s Will, but sadly many disagree with God’s Will and instead agree and work with Satan, trying to thwart God’s Will. Or so they foolishly think. Such was Herod, king of Judea. His life was the life of a murderer. So it was not difficult for him to issue an order of death for the one who threatened his reign as king of Judea. To ensure the completeness of this edict, he ordered every male child in Bethlehem, two-years young and younger, to be put to death and it was so.

The suffering of that day is difficult to understand, especially while the voice of the Christmas angel is still ringing in our ear, “Christ the Savior is born!” But to this day the anguished cries of the mothers of the Holy Innocents is still heard among us. Although it is difficult for us to understand, a holy purpose was achieved in the slaughter of the innocents. Their deaths pointed to the persecution, suffering, and death of the Holy Son of God and it also pointed to the persecution, suffering, and deaths of those who confess faith in the Atoning Sacrifice of the holy child born in Bethlehem, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His coming into this sin-filled world as a child of the Virgin Mary had one purpose, to offer His life upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of life eternal.

No one knows for certain how many boys were slaughtered on that day, but we are comforted knowing their deaths were the death of martyrs, for these babes of Bethlehem would not have been slaughtered if the Christ had not been born among them. The Collect for Holy Innocents Day expresses this, saying; *“Almighty God, the martyred innocents of Bethlehem showed forth Your praise not by speaking but by dying.”* Today it may well be said of this noble band of martyrs, that they are gathered around the throne of the Lamb for whom they died. Indeed, Holy Scripture may well speak of their new status as those, ***“who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.” (Revelation 14:4–5, ESV)*** Blameless souls who died in terror, are now living for all eternity in the tranquility and joy of heaven.

Evil had come upon the land, Herod’s malice had fulfilled that spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, ***“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.” (v. 18)***

Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, had difficulty bearing children. Often her cries of bareness were heard throughout Jacob’s tent. Finally, God blessed her and gave her two sons, Joseph, and Benjamin. While giving birth to Benjamin she died and was buried at Bethlehem. Rachel’s lamentations are expressed by Jeremiah who witnesses the deportation of God’s people to Babylon. He describes the agony of this tragedy as the grief of parents for a rebellious child, as Rachel watching her descendants carried away into exile, fearing that they will never be seen again. All this took place in Ramah, in the territory of Benjamin, where the exiles were gathered for deportation to Babylon. Rachel weeps for her children. Thus, St. Matthew uses Jeremiah’s quote to express the abject sorrow of the mothers in Bethlehem whose sons were slaughtered by Herod’s soldiers.

Rachel’s cry is often heard today. It is the cry of the church as she weeps for her lost sons and daughters. It is the deep cries of pastors who look agonizingly at their congregations’ records seeing countless children laid in the arms of the mother church through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism who never survive even junior confirmation. A staggering host of young soldiers of the cross who confessed their faith at the time of their first communion yet fell prey to the enemy’s

fiery weapons of immorality and uncleanness. Thousand of nominal members who never really gave their heart in total commitment for the holy crusade of worship, confession, repentance, and service, who never truly understood Word and Sacrament ministry and the communion of God's people at the altar rail.

Such as these are who Jesus looked upon as He stood outside the city gates of Jerusalem, and filled with sorrow, says, ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34, ESV)*** They were not willing. Yes, many people are not willing, but God is always willing to *Save His Children*. No further proof need be necessary than God's Will was carried out in His Son completing His mission of dying on the Cross that the lost could be gathered under His wings.

These are those to whom our Lord Jesus was sent. He was ***“sent . . . to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24, ESV)*** When He sent out the Twelve to proclaim the Gospel, He sent them ***“to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 10:6, ESV)*** Those who have fallen away from the church, these are the lost sheep today, these are to be counted among those to whom we are sent, to whom we are to proclaim the love of God in Christ Jesus, to whom we are to call to repentance that they may be counted among the *Saved Children of God*. But these are not the only ones to whom we should go.

All men were created by God, but not all are His children, not all come to faith, becoming children of God. Yet, this is not the Will of God but the will of the lost. Born with hearts of stone, dead in their sins and trespasses, corrupt from the womb, they have no desire to hear the Word of God and be saved. They are self-seeking, deniers of the truth, and obedient to unrighteousness. To such as these there is only the wrath and judgment of God (Rom. 2:8-9). Yet God still Wills their salvation.

To this end God gave us the Gospel, the truth of man's salvation through the willing effort of His Son Jesus whose death opened the door of God's heart that He would forgive us our sins for the sake of His beloved Son. Moreover, to that end God gave us the church with the office of the holy ministry to proclaim that Gospel to a world dying of sin. For there is no other way to be saved than from hearing the word of Christ, the blessed Gospel truth of salvation through His life, death, and resurrection (Rom. 10:17).

God's Will is done as He brings men to faith through hearing the Gospel or receiving faith and the Holy Spirit through the blessed waters of Baptism. At that time, God adopts you as a child of His. He brings you into His holy and gracious kingdom. Human cries of anguish are changed to shouts of joy. Death no longer has dominion over you and when your soul departs this life it will take up residence in God's kingdom of glory standing along side those Holy Innocents who were so brutally murdered by Herod. For like them God has declared you blameless.

God's Will is done on earth as it is in heaven. God's Will is to *Save His Children*. See how blessed you are to be a child of God! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.