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Today we have come to the tenth day of Christmas and the Second Sunday after Christmas. If you have kept up with the lessons of the Book of Common Prayer you will have noticed that the Church compresses about the first three years of Jesus' life into three weeks. Already we have celebrated His birth on Christmas Day, the Martyrdom of the Holy Innocents, His Circumcision eight days later on New Year's Day, and this coming week the visit of the Magi at the Epiphany. However, this did not all occur in the first three weeks of Jesus' earthly life. It is thought that the slaughter of the Holy Innocents occurred a year or two after Jesus was born, because Herod commanded that every baby boy in Bethlehem should die from two years old and younger. The visit of the Magi, what we celebrate as the Epiphany is also thought to take place sometime after the Nativity, but before the flight into Egypt. The Holy Family flees to Egypt after being warned by an angel that Herod seeks to kill the Christ Child. And so, they seek refuge where the Israelites, the sons of Jacob, had sought refuge a thousand years before.

The one character responsible for the turmoil that the Holy Family experiences right after Jesus's birth is Herod. Herod was the original Grinch, and he proves to be the chief villain of the Christmas story. There was no one more opposed to the infant Jesus Christ and all that he stood for than Herod. For he was the opposite of Christ in every way. If we take the term Anti-Christ literally, as anyone who is opposed to Christ, then the term Antichrist is certainly to be applied to Herod. We know from the Gospels that Herod was the King of Israel, but really a puppet of the Roman Government. Unlike Jesus, he was not of the royal lineage of David and had no claim to the Jewish throne. He was seen as an imposter by the Pharisees and Temple priests and hated because he was the living embodiment of their Roman captivity. Herod's reign was infamous. He orchestrated the massacre of the Holy Innocents, murdered his own children, one of his wives, his in-laws,

executed anyone who would challenge or criticize his authority, and sought to murder the infant Christ-child. Because of this, Herod's name is synonymous with death and wickedness. His reign was a reign of darkness, death, and cruelty.

Yet for all of Herod's earthly power and cruelty, the news of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem truly threatened him and his kingdom in a curious way. It is remarkable to think that the man who lived in a great palace and feasted every day finds his kingdom threatened by the helpless infant born in a stable. But his is not the last kingdom that will be shaken by the Christ-child. God stoops down to earth in His Son, who born on the margins of civilization, upsets the status quo, and the world is never the same. The infant child Jesus is the polar opposite of the Herods of the world in every way. Jesus came not to establish or overthrow an earthly Kingdom, yet His very existence challenged Herod's kingdom. Jesus was of the royal line of David; we can trace his ancestry back to King David in the Gospels, but this lineage does not seat him on any earthly throne. Our Lord's Kingdom is a Kingdom of everlasting life and light. Herod sought to put his enemies to death, and our Lord seeks to give Everlasting Life to all people. Herod died a painful death and from his deathbed ordered that the the aristocrats of Jerusalem be put to death. Jesus also died a painful death, and at His death a new aristocracy was being made from Heaven, out of the lives of the saints of old, rising up from the grave of sin and death with new life to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel that leads to another Kingdom, God's Kingdom.

Even the very names of Herod and Jesus are opposed to each other. The name Herod is synonymous with death and darkness. Mention his name and most people think of one of the greatest enemies of God and Scripture in all of history. Even in the world's mind, the name Herod is in a class along with Judas, Nero, Hitler, and Stalin. Yet the Name of Jesus is synonymous with Life and Love. The world may not fully grasp who Jesus is, but ask a person on the street who

Jesus is, and even those who do not believe in Him will say, *He was a really great person*. Yet we know Him as more than just a really great person. For us, He is God of God and Light of Light, the Savior of the world, whose very Name overthrows the Kingdoms of darkness. And, we are given the promise that this Name is above every other Name, *that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*.

This is where the comparisons between Herod and Jesus break down. Herod and Jesus are not equal; Anti-Christ and Christ are not equal. The difference is on a par with that between God and Satan. There is no equality between the two because one is infinite God and the other is a fallen creature. Herod's earthly kingdom and Satan's spiritual kingdom are kingdoms of darkness because they have rejected God's light and His life. Remember, *the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness overcame it not*.

This is good news to take with us into a New Year. Regardless of how we feel about the past year, whether we think it has been a year where perhaps Satan has been loosed and the kingdom of darkness has come to power, or not, let us remember that the Name of Jesus, the Light of Jesus and His Gospel is our strength. Let us dedicate this New Year in the mighty Name of Jesus.