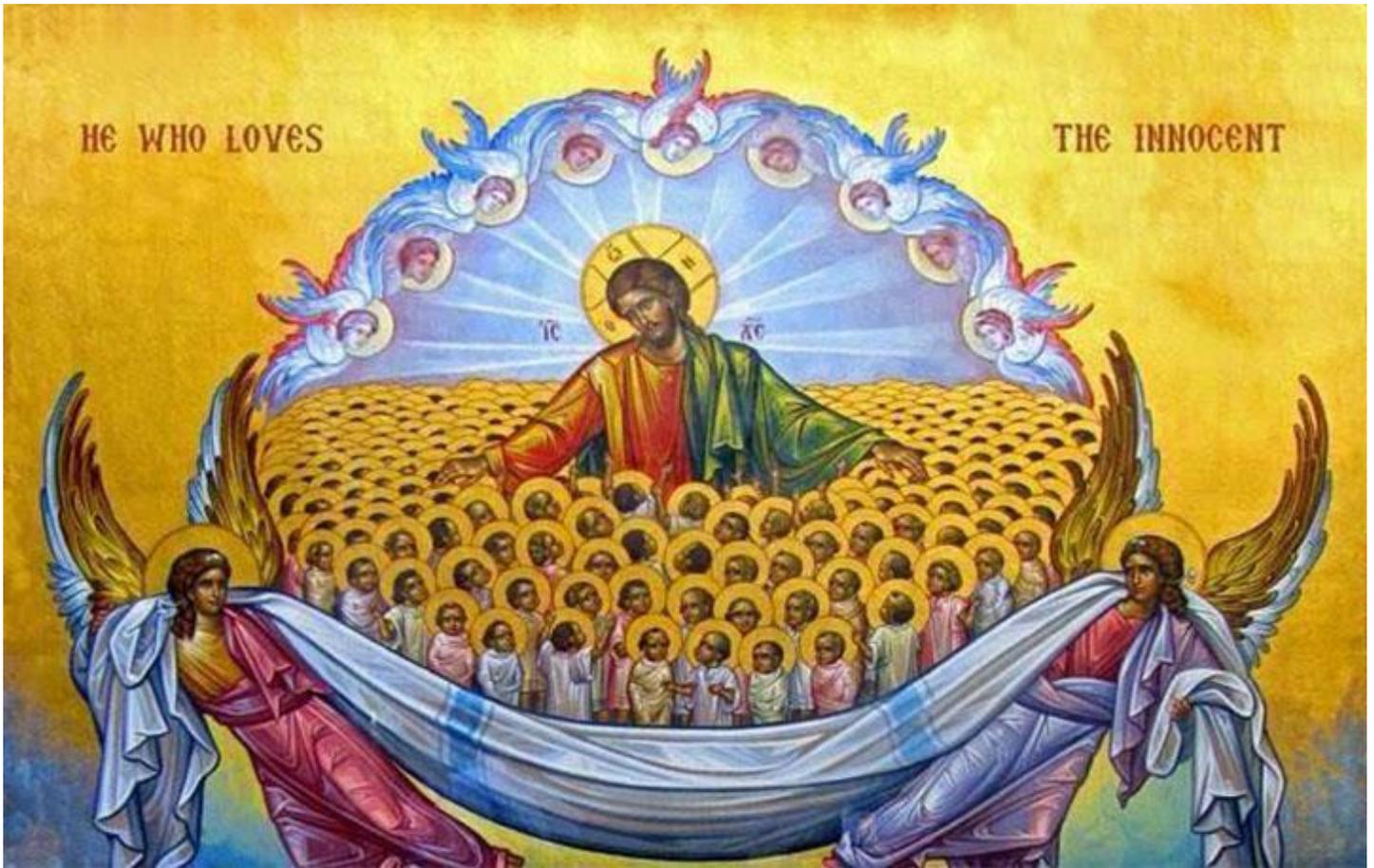


Tuesday 28 December 2021

Holy Innocents



Herod 'the Great' was appointed King of the Jews by the Roman authorities in Palestine and he proved to be ruthlessly efficient in his thirty-three years of dealing with his subjects. In Matthew's gospel, he tried to persuade the Magi, to whom he played the host on their journey seeking the one 'who has been born king of the Jews', to bring word of where they had found him. His desire was to get rid of Jesus and, when he realised that the Magi had tricked him and left the country, Herod poured out his wrath on all the male infants in the land. These were God's 'innocent' ones, paralleling the story of Pharaoh slaughtering the Hebrew children in Egypt.

Sermon © Jo Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 **Ve**s**

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

On this day when we recall the murder of innocent lives,
let us stand before our just and holy God,
and remembering the violence and injustice of our world,
confess our sins in penitence and faith.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,

**Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for the Holy Innocents

Heavenly Father,
whose children suffered at the hands of Herod,
though they had done no wrong:
by the suffering of your Son
and by the innocence of our lives
frustrate all evil designs
and establish your reign of justice and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Jeremiah

Thus says the Lord: 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. *Jeremiah 31:15-17*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. *1 Corinthians 1:26-29*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 How s**

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Alleluia, alleluia.

Never despise these little ones;
their guardian angels in heaven look continuously
on the face of my heavenly Father.

All Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Now after the wise men had left, 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 fulfil 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.' *Matthew 2:13-18*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Who's that knocking on the window,
Who's that standing at the door,
What are all those presents
Lying on the kitchen floor?
Who is the smiling stranger
With hair as white as gin,
What is he doing with the children
And who could have let him in?
Why has he rubies on his fingers,
A cold, cold crown on his head,
Why, when he caws his carol,
Does the salty snow run red?
Why does he ferry my fireside
As a spider on a thread,
His fingers made of fuses
And his tongue of gingerbread?
Why does the world before him
Melt in a million suns,
Why do his yellow, yearning eyes
Burn like saffron buns?
Watch where he comes walking
Out of the Christmas flame,
Dancing, double-talking:
Herod is his name.

Innocent's Song by Charles Causley

Like the punchline in this chilling poem by Charles Causley, the Feast of Holy Innocents comes as a shock after the Christmas celebrations. From the joy of Jesus' birth, the angels and the star, we are plunged into a world of horror.

King Herod perceives a threat to his power and reacts with ruthless and brutal violence: he orders the murder of thousands of children under the age of two in the hope of ensuring the death of the 'rival' new-born king.

Mass infanticide as a way of preventing future opposition was not a new idea. We see Pharaoh ordering the killing of the Hebrew children in Exodus because he perceives the number of children his slaves are bearing as a threat (Exodus 1). The author of Exodus even suggests that God used this strategy in the story of the death of the Egyptian first-born (Exodus 11). At the time Exodus was written, people

believed gods behaved very much like human rulers, protecting their own chosen people and annihilating those who threatened them just like the kings of the countries around them.

Of course, as Christians, we no longer believe this. The New Testament shows us that God was never that kind of implacable, vengeful deity. In Jesus, God shows us that His idea of power, and how power should be exercised, is very different.

Jesus came to earth as a child in a moderately poor family. As he grew up, he discovered that he had great power. But it was the power to love, to heal and to live in truth; not the power to oppress others.

The world hasn't changed that much since Jesus lived on earth. Powerful people continue to oppress the poor, to create systems that favour those who are already rich and powerful—and even, horrifically, to commit ethnic cleansing and genocide.

If we follow Jesus, our understanding of power has to change. Whatever power we have, it is given to us so that we can love God and our neighbour. It is given to us so that we can share the resources we enjoy. It is given to us so that we can protect the beautiful world God created and of which we are to be responsible stewards.

Of course, none of us will ever order the murder of thousands of children. Most of us would never willingly harm a single hair on a child's head.

But whenever we use the power we have to get our own way, or to shore up our own position, we are still sinning. We are thinking in the way that ultimately led Herod to order the massacre of the innocents; the kind of thinking that leads world rulers today to disregard the welfare of their people. We may be acting on a smaller scale, but the underlying priority, 'I'm the most important', 'I must get what I want', is the same.

As we reflect on the tragedy of the Holy Innocents, let's commit ourselves afresh to justice and integrity in the use of whatever power we have. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,

died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

In peace let us pray to the God of love.

Righteous God,
your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ dwelt among us
and shared our grief and our pain.
We pray for the children of our world,
that they may grow up knowing love and security.

Silence is kept

We pray for all children who suffer physical or mental abuse.

Silence is kept

We pray for all communities in our world
who live with the memories of massacre and gross cruelty.

Silence is kept

We pray for all who are corrupted by power
and who regard human life as cheap.

Silence is kept

We pray for parents who have suffered the death of a child.

Silence is kept

We pray for parents and guardians,
that they may be given grace to care for the children entrusted to them.

Silence is kept

As we celebrate the coming of the Christ-child,
we rejoice in the fellowship of the Holy Innocents
and commit the children of this community,
our nation and our world to you,
our righteous God.

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The peace

'I will comfort you,' says the Lord, 'as a mother comforts her child,
and you shall be comforted.'

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [O**](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

God, who gives life to the dead and comfort to the desolate,
sustain you, keep you and console you,
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 [C**](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever-living God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In love for our fallen human race,

you sent your Son into the world to lighten our darkness.

In his life he rejoiced in the innocence and beauty of children;

in his death he carried in his body the violence and cruelty of our world;

in his resurrection

he brought life and salvation to his people

and began the new creation.

As our ascended and merciful high priest,

he hears our cries and knows our grief;

and will come as universal Lord to whom all must give account.

Therefore with all the angels of heaven

we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name

and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

All Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We praise and bless you, loving Father,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord;

and as we obey his command,

send your Holy Spirit,

that broken bread and wine outpoured

may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with the Holy Innocents and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord Jesus Christ,
in your humility you have stooped to share our human life
with the most defenceless of your children:
may we who have received these gifts of your passion
rejoice in celebrating the witness of the holy innocents
to the purity of your sacrifice
made once for all upon the cross;
for you are alive and reign, now and for ever..

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.