

Worship Material
Precious Lives
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 28th December

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord, we praise and thank you
for the joy and wonder of Christmas,
and for all the blessings we enjoy at this time.
As we continue to celebrate the good news of your birth,
help us to be mindful of those who are in pain,
difficulty or danger at this time.
Please be with them as we thank you for being with us.
Amen.

Read Matthew 2:13-23

Bible notes

This is a very hard story to hear. On one level God saves and protects his Son (a good thing) by Joseph's attention to a prophetic dream. But we are also made deeply aware of the precious lives cut short by Herod's jealousy and paranoia, and the grief this brings on their families. Many of us who have lost children, and see children dying prematurely around the world, want to weep with Rachel and refuse comfort.

There is no record of this slaying of children anywhere other than in the Gospels, but it is not out of character for Herod, called the Great, who was not beyond killing a wife and a child if they threatened his power and the fragile arrangement he had created with the Roman Empire. Is the slaughter of innocents by the powerful a thing too commonplace or too dangerous to record? In this passage, Matthew uses his idea of Jesus 'full-filling' Old Testament prophecy, that is, giving more than originally intended. Usually it is better, but here it is worse. Rachel, one of the wives of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin, was entombed near Bethlehem and in Jeremiah her name is used to represent the spirit of a region that has lost most of its population to exile (Jeremiah 31:15). All the young and strong are gone. In Matthew, Rachel represents all those mothers whose sons have been murdered by Herod.

More positively, Matthew uses his idea of 'full-filling' in calling attention to place names. Previously, the magi had been pointed to Bethlehem by a prophecy, to the City of David, the shepherd boy who became king. Jesus, Matthew implies, is a better shepherd and king than David. Then there is Egypt and a prophecy about God calling his people out of slavery, implying that Jesus is a new and better Moses. Finally, there is Nazareth and here Matthew may cheat a little. He cannot seem to find any prophecy to support Jesus' time there. He does know of people who took a special promise not to drink wine or cut their hair until their vow was fulfilled. Samson was one. Paul also took such a vow. They were called Nazarites and this is what he tries to twist into a prophecy. Or perhaps he is saying that, in Jesus, there is a better model of following God?

Prayer

Caring God,
we pray for all those who are hurting right now.
We pray for all those who are crying right now.
We ask that you would comfort them
and surround them with your love.

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, at this time of bright lights and celebrations,
thank you for the joy and blessings of the season.
Please help us as we go to remain mindful
of those who see more darkness than light
and feel more sorrow than joy.
Help us to do all we can to show them your love.

Amen.