

Sermon – Matthew 2:13-23
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Grace Lutheran Church
1 Christmas – Year A
28 December 2025

“The Dream in Danger”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It's amazing how quickly things turn. Just a few days ago, our living room was immaculate. Beautifully wrapped presents waited under the tree and anticipation hung in the air. That all changed quickly on Christmas morning. Make no mistake; it was wonderful. Gifts given and received with joy and love, reminders of the true gift of the season, Jesus the Christ Child. But goodness, did it go quickly. By the time I left to come to Grace for Christmas Day worship, our living room had become a holding pen for recyclable materials. So it remained until yesterday, when the village picked up the recycling that was already in the bin and we could fill it up again with our Christmas detritus. We've just about built all of the new LEGO sets, for goodness' sake! Maybe your Christmas has been similar; if not literally, metaphorically. It's the Fourth Day of Christmas but it also feels so quickly over. Here we are, back to normal, ready to move on.
2. It's amazing how quickly things turn. The angels and shepherd of which Luke told us on Christmas Eve have returned to their heavens and their fields, respectively. The Magi have completed their long journey, following the star to find the newborn king. They've given their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The wrapping paper has been ripped off and the recycling taken out. And how quickly things go back to normal. Normal in all the worst ways. Normal in broken ways of this world, in which peace on earth and goodwill

to all people are the exception, not the rule. Here, in the wake of Christmas, we are confronted with a massacre. The wise men receive a divine dream, urging them to go home by another road. Joseph, too, receives divine direction and flees with his family to Egypt. Herod, unable to find the one child, takes out his wrath on the many. This paranoid potentate seeks to eliminate any possible threat to his reign and orders his troops to put to death all children in the area who were two years or younger. This is heartbreakingly extreme, but not out of character. Herod had two of his own sons murdered because he saw them as threats to his rule.

3. For all of the wonderful ways in which we value children, especially at Christmas, it is also true that they are the least of these, often the first to be forgotten. We have our own modern-day massacres and mistreatments of the innocents. From 2020 through 2024, 329 children in Chicago were victims of homicide. Since the war in Gaza began in October 2023, more than 20,000 children in Gaza have been killed. That's more than one per hour, if you're keeping score at home. Our own nation has taken to separating families through increased immigration enforcement; this year, more children have been taken from their parents and placed in government "shelters" than in the past four years combined. All of which is simply to say that the situation of the Holy Family is closer to the rule than the exception. Joseph and Mary find themselves in a situation all too common for young families who simply want the chance to raise their children in peace. But rather than being able to put down roots, violence forces them to flee, refugees in a foreign land.
4. If this seems like a disruption of the Christmas story, however, perhaps we haven't been paying close enough attention. The Son of God did not leave the splendors of heaven to stay distant from the dangers of earth. Jesus was born precisely for these children, lost and forsaken. While the angels come to Joseph in dreams and lead the Holy Family from immediate danger, it is merely a delay. Jesus, Mary's baby boy and the Father's only Son, will

eventually suffer death at the hands of another Herod. In his dying, though, Jesus destroys the power of death. In his cross, Jesus opens wide his arms to all. Even and especially to children, so easily disposed of by this world.

5. Today, in just a few minutes, Audrey Rae will be brought to the baptismal font by her parents and sponsors. Audrey is blessed to be born to parents who love her, blessed to have home and safety and love in this world. May it be so for every child. Today, by God's grace alone, Audrey is welcomed into God's family forever. Her baptism is a reminder that God is the God of children. That God doesn't wait for children to become adults who prove themselves worthy of love and welcome. Audrey is already everything God needs her to be, and we can't wait to see everything that God does in and through her. And as we witness her baptism today, so, too, do we hear God's call to create a world in which all children have access to this world's abundance, regardless of the circumstances of their birth.

6. Matthew's first readers would have caught the allusions immediately. Centuries before, their people had been led by a dreamer named Joseph to seek safety in Egypt. That safety had evaporated. 400 years later, they would flee Egypt to escape a child-murdering monarch. The scene is recapitulated in the saving story of Jesus as another Joseph returns to Egypt with his family. Jesus, the Savior of the world, enters into this world as a vulnerable child. He endures the vicissitudes of life and the victimhood of death. But nothing in this life or death will undo what Jesus has been born to do: raise all children of earth, to life in the coming kingdom and to lives of dignity in this world. Let us worship the Christ child by caring for children. For while Christmas flies away, the promise of the Christ Child lives on. There is still darkness in this world, but as John proclaims, the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Amen. Merry Christmas!

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.