

- Also read Jeremiah 31:10-17

## Introduction

- What place does this incident have at Christmas time?
  - hardly the coming of the Prince of Peace!
  - infanticide, mass murder, slaughter, weeping, wailing, loud lamentations, etc!
  - maybe its that jarring, that awkward putting together of incidents that makes it all the harder to examine?
- How could God have allowed such a hideous event?
  - especially in the context of the coming of Jesus, who was to bring peace and reconciliation and healing...
  - no idea of the numbers - maybe not huge - but truly dreadful!
  - who could carry out such orders?
  - our minds rebel, though we know that such horror is all too possible -
    - Auschwitz>Birkenau, Dachau and the rest; Rwanda; the ethnic hatred of Bosnia and Serbia, smaller scale atrocities closer to home - Holly Wells & Jessica Chapman just the most recent; etc, etc!

## Background

- Step back for a moment and take in some of the background, especially with respect to the perpetrator:
- Herod was a man filled and fueled by his insecurities
  - his father appointed procurator of Judea by Julius Ceasar in 47BC
  - his father then appointed him military prefect of Galilee shortly afterwards
  - Roman governor of Syria was impressed, and added to Herod's domain
  - Roman civil wars - Anthony, Cleopatra, etc - rendered his position precarious!!
  - Romans civil war calmed down, but he still felt under threat from Jewish Hasmonean family, who resented being replaced on the throne by one they felt an upstart!
  - though he married into this family, he was so suspicious he murdered them off one by one (including his wife Mariamne, in about 29BC)
  - he garnered favour with the Romans by extending their power and influence, almost doing their dirty work for them, subduing the territory over which he ruled...
  - nothing he did, not even lavish expenditure on the Temple in Jerusalem, commended him to his Jewish subjects!
  - his Edomite descent was never forgotten...
  - and he seems to have had a deeply suspicious nature, which dovetails exactly with the account we read of the visit of the Magi...
- He was a vicious, insecure, probably frightened, tyrant!

## Freedom to Choose is Costly

- Herod is but one example of the costliness of living our own way!
- Way back God gave us freedom of choice, the freedom to live our lives as we chose, not to be mere puppets...
  - it was that ability to choose that led Adam and Eve into sin
  - it is that choice that permits sin, rebellion, suffering
  - but it is also that choice that permits relationship, love, self-giving
  - if not given freedom of choice, we would be merely automatons, robots
  - indeed, it is that freedom to choose how we live that makes us human!
- God gave us our humanity, but it is a costly gift!!
- So when we look out at a world gone awry, this is what has happened
  - and much closer to home, our choices have the same potential effects
  - not just in the grand events of history!
- On a number of occasions when doing funerals I have come across lives marred

in a very particular way by **costly choices**:

(most recently when covering for a fellow minister in another part of Dundee)

- people who have **chosen** to allow their **temper** to break their family apart
  - people who have **chosen not to say sorry** and seek reconciliation when they have let others down
  - people who have **chosen** to **think the worst**, rather than the best, of what someone else has said or done...
- So, as we look at this terrible incident and wonder **why?**
    - God permitted this to happen, as the consequence of giving Herod his humanity;
    - **the fear in Herod that lashed out in hideous rage was a terrible consequence of the choices Herod made in his humanity... choices that actually led to his enslavement to his fear and temper**
    - God did not **plan** for it to happen
    - indeed, the same father heart of God that wept to lose his own son on the Cross knows all too well the pain that the mothers in Bethlehem would have felt!

## The Choice to Free Us was Costly

- And it was actually that anguish over sin and its dreadful consequences that prompted Jesus' presence in the midst of this incident!
  - for in sending Jesus to save us, God has chosen to free us from the costly choice we have made to sin
  - and the path to true freedom for us lies through suffering;
  - Satan did everything in his power to thwart what God was doing;
  - he even slaughtered many children in his hatred of God's rescue plan
- And this was **par for the course** for God's plan:
  - for it necessitated Jesus entering fully into our world and all its sufferings;
  - being caught up in all the dreadful consequences of the choice to sin
  - living amidst the slavery of people who have given control to a dreadful new master - **sin**
- And so he himself suffered:
  - misunderstood, even from childhood - at Temple...; Pharisees thinking he was from Satan!
  - rejected: the fickle crowds who deserted him early on; the adoring crowds ("Hallelujah!") who turned on him ("Crucify") in Jerusalem; the close friends who ran when he was arrested;
  - unjustly convicted
  - and tortured: the soldiers & crown of thorns; the lashing; carrying the Cross; the agony of the Cross itself
- **He suffered to rescue us from our slavery, from the consequences of our choices!**
- So God has **redeemed** this most black and bleak of incidents:
  - not approving of what happened at all
  - but weaving it into his plan to save;
  - giving to even this most terrible of human atrocities a place in his purposes

## Conclusion

- Life is costly!
- Christmas was costly!
  - and not just because of all the presents and entertaining...
- Our freedom to make our own decisions is costly
  - and God's response, God's remedy for our choices, was costly!
- Let's choose to live in the **costly-for-Jesus freedom** he gives, and not the **costly-for-us "freedom"** of our own selfish choices!