

A Hope That Still Reverberates Matthew 2:1–12

After the Curtain Falls

The busy and joyful season of Christmas has passed, and we are now moving toward the end of the year. After our Christmas Eve service, I shared dinner with members of Zion Korean UMC at the parsonage. When everyone had gone home and the house became quiet, I found myself sitting alone—and suddenly, a Korean song came to mind. Its title is “After the Curtain Falls.” The lyrics go like this:

“Have you ever stayed behind in an empty theater after the play is over, looking at the stage after the lights have gone out? The music has stopped. The sets are no longer moving. Only silence remains on the stage... Only loneliness lingers.”

The singer is describing the stillness of an empty theater after the performance ends. And in many ways, that feeling is familiar to us too. When the excitement of Christmas and the year-end rush fades, and we return to ordinary life, we sometimes feel a similar quiet—almost a kind of emptiness.

Think back to the Christmas Eve we shared together. That evening, we gathered to hear the story of Christ’s birth. We shared candlelight. We rejoiced together. Personally, I was deeply moved by the dramatized readings. Those who read didn’t just read the story—they brought it to life. The Christmas story felt real, as if it were happening right in front of us.

And especially when Amanda came forward holding Elizabeth as she read, and Zach joined her to help, I couldn’t help but feel that the image of the holy family was reverberating through that moment—through that family, right before our eyes.

But the excitement and warmth of Christmas begins to fade. The joy Mary and Joseph felt as they held their first child did not last forever. The amazement they felt when the shepherds shared their astonishing story eventually passed. The angels’ songs that once filled the night sky came to an end. Morning came. And the world returned to ordinary life. And Mary and Joseph—like all of us—had to face reality again.

Herod the Great

As I reflected on today’s passage, I was struck by how Scripture is not just an old story from long ago. It feels more like a mirror—one that clearly reflects the reality of our world today. The harsh reality that Mary and Joseph had to face does not stay in the past. It still reverberates into our present moment.

The visit of the Magi was meant to be an act of worship. They came to honor the newborn Jesus. But along the way, they stop at King Herod’s palace, when they lost their way. That makes sense, doesn’t it? But the question they asked—“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”—ignited Herod’s deepest fear.

Who was Herod? He was a deeply contradictory figure. History calls him “Herod the Great.” And that title tells us a lot. Herod spent his entire life trying to prove just how *great* he was. He was a brilliant builder and a shrewd politician. He constructed the massive fortress of Masada in the wilderness. He rebuilt and expanded the Jerusalem Temple into something grand and magnificent. Wherever he went, he left behind monumental buildings bearing his name. From the outside, he looked like a great and powerful leader—someone who could restore a

broken nation and protect its people. Many probably believed that those high walls and grand structures would keep them safe.

But beneath that obsession with greatness was something else. Deep insecurity. Herod needed to be at the center. He could not tolerate rivals. Anyone who threatened his power—even slightly—was eliminated. History tells us he executed his own wife, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law and even three of his sons. So the Roman Emperor Augustus once joked, “It is better to be Herod’s pig than his son.” Because Jews don’t eat pork, it means the pigs were better off staying alive than the son.

Herod believed, “Only I can save this nation. Only I can fix the problem.” But his heart was ruled by fear—fear that his power could disappear. So imagine what happens when he hears that another “king of the Jews” has been born. Terrified, Herod orders the unthinkable: All boys two years old and under in Bethlehem are to be killed. Isn’t that deeply ironic? A man with absolute power—terrified of a newborn child. This is the paradox of insecure power. This is what an insecure tyrant looks like.

And my friends, Herod’s madness did not end two thousand years ago. Even today, we see leaders who shout about greatness, strength, and prosperity—yet act out of fear. And that fear is often redirected toward the most vulnerable.

Just as Herod looked at a fragile infant and called that child a political threat, our world is still quick to put dangerous labels on people it fears. We see immigrants—people simply seeking life and safety—called criminals, invaders, enemies of social order. We see racial minorities labeled “dangerous” or “agitators” simply for standing up for their dignity, or for existing in certain spaces. We see our LGBTQI+ siblings treated as threats to “traditional values,” their lives debated, legislated, and erased—as if difference itself were dangerous. We see the poor and the unhoused dismissed as “eyesores” or “burdens,” not as people who need homes, but as problems to be swept away. In Herod’s eyes—and too often in our world—these children of God are not seen as neighbors to be protected. They are seen as threats to be removed—dehumanized, demonized, and pushed aside.

But Scripture tells us something very clear. The small, vulnerable child Herod tried so desperately to destroy was, in fact, the One who would save the world. And that truth still reverberates today: God’s salvation does not come through violent power, but through vulnerable love.

A Hope That Still Reverberates

In the face of Herod’s razor-sharp threat, God did not strike Herod down with lightning from heaven. God did not send an army of angels to wipe out the Roman forces. Instead, God came quietly—in a dream. God speaks to Joseph and says, “Get up. Take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

This means that the King of kings, from the very moment of his birth, had to pack up and run in the middle of the night just to stay alive. He had to flee to a foreign land—Egypt—where the language was unfamiliar, where he knew no one. In other words, Jesus became a refugee. If Jesus were born in our world today, Jesus might be found among those we see in the news—families carrying what little they have, crossing borders to escape war, political instability, or gang violence.

Immanuel—God with us—did not choose a royal palace. God came down to the place of the displaced, the rejected, the fleeing. God came to the place of the refugee. So what comfort and hope does this give us? It tells us that the God we believe in is not a God who watches

suffering from a safe distance in heaven. This is a God who steps right into the center of violence and injustice created by rulers like Herod. God suffers with us. And because Jesus was once a refugee, Jesus knows—deeply, personally—the pain of those who are rejected, excluded, and pushed aside today.

My friends, when the play is over and the lights go out—when the glitter of Christmas fades—it can feel as though Herod’s shadow still lingers. It can feel as though the powerful continue to oppress the vulnerable. As though hatred and exclusion still rule the day. But hear this: Hope has not vanished. Just as Herod’s blade could not destroy the infant Jesus, no darkness in this world can extinguish the life God gives. Herod’s shouting once seemed to shake the world—but it faded into history. Yet the love of God, which began with the cry of a newborn child, still reverberates—in our hearts, and across the world, even two thousand years later. That is the hope we carry. A hope that still reverberates.

So Real Christian faith begins after the Christmas excitement fades. When a play ends, the actors take off their costumes and return to ordinary life. But for us as people of faith, it’s the opposite. When the celebration of Christmas is over, we are sent out onto the stage of the world as true witnesses. Holding onto this deep conviction—Emmanuel, God is with us—now is the time to sing a song of love, not with our voices, but with our lives, Right in the middle of our everyday routines. Right in the middle of a broken world. So go now, carrying a hope the world cannot silence—a hope that still reverberates. Amen.