

## Dangerous Revelation

*"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born."*

This past week we observed the Feast of the Holy Innocents. We normally hear this reading from Matthew on a Sunday in Christmas, but the timing of Christmas this year did not allow it.

This is the troubling story of King Herod's fearful, tyrannical response to the news that a new "king" had been born to Israel. While the news is for us one of great promise, this news, inadvertently delivered to Herod by the three Magi, came to Herod as deep threat.

Threat and promise. That is what we receive in the gift of the Christ child. And though in the western church we have relegated them to a cameo appearance in our annual Christmas pageants, the wise men from the East have a far larger role to play.

As they encounter Herod, these journeying magi discover that good news has enemies.

The arrival of these men in Jerusalem and their excited inquiry into the birth of the new king of the Jews releases Herod's deepest fears and his response is swift and dark.

Just beyond the part of the story we hear today, after the wise men decide to go home by another way and not give Herod the information he sought, we learn that Herod sends word to kill all of the children in and around Bethlehem who were under two years of age. It is these innocent children, slain by a fearful, despotic king that we observe on a special day.

Sometimes it feels like the Herod's of the world seem to have it all their way—no matter that they lack integrity, bow to hatred, and kill the innocent. It can be tempting to feel helpless when evil and tyranny seem to have all the power. And it is easy to fall into helpless thinking because there is some truth in it—we do live in a world where evil people often seem to flourish. Isaiah refers to these forces as a "thick darkness."

And we can't simply pretend power used for evil doesn't exist. There is nothing in Scripture that tells us that is the way to go. What we are called to do is find the freedom within our own spirits, within our life together as a community of faith, to shine in the midst of darkness.

So, yes, as these wise men discovered in their encounter with Herod, the world can feel clogged with evil and woe, but that is not the entire story.

If we only see the world as broken and irredeemable, then we will fail to see that bright light that has come into the world and we will miss our opportunity and responsibility to help shine that light into dark places.

The joyful and expectant quest of these men from the East remind us that even in the midst of the Herod's of the world grabbing all the headlines; God's mercy and light can guide us to hope and truth.

Yes, darkness is real and pervasive. Prophets, priests, psalmists, even Jesus never make any explanation of the existence of evil, but all of them speak of God's power to equip us with the power to resist and deny evil's power.

Herod is afraid because he knows that you cannot kill the truth. Once the strong Word of God's truth, justice and love have been spoken, and have been given life by the voices of all of those who refuse to call darkness light, it will not die. It echoes and rings and continues to vibrate throughout the world.

This child whom these men travel so far to see grew to call us to a place of conviction and courage, he taught us to place of faith and trust in God's promises.

Jesus' life reminds us that no matter how dark, corrupt and foolish the times may seem, God continually calls us to enact and claim beauty and truth...to fight for justice and mercy.

For wherever we shine the light of God's justice, truth, beauty and love it continues to live, bring hope, give life, and transform the world.

Darkness and light cannot live together so as Isaiah has said, "Arise shine; for your light has come, lift up your eyes and look around because the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!"

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+