

# The Holy Innocents and Herod

## The Insidiousness of Evil

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. ...

A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more. (Mt 2:16-19)

Matthew is the only evangelist who recounts the “**Massacre of the Holy Innocents.**” Why? Matthew was a Jew from Galilee where Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch during most of Jesus’ life. Matthew grew up with the stories of Herod the Great’s cruelties, for Herod was considered to be a madman. Since Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience it was important to show how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the New; hence the reference to Rachel weeping for her children. Matthew focused on the “**anawim,**” the poor and the lowly, and saw fit to include the story other historians thought too insignificant to cover, for it concerned the murder of innocent babies of poor peasant people in the lowly towns of Bethlehem and the surrounding areas. It is presumed Matthew was some years older than Jesus and would have been a child or teenager at the time of Jesus’ birth, the Massacre of the Holy Innocents and the death of Herod the Great. When the leader of a country orders the murder of so many innocent children it would have been talked about and would have been recalled with exquisite pain, especially amongst the families affected.

Some claim the Massacre never took place because the Hebrew historian Flavius Josephus did not mention it. Others claim Matthew’s Gospel has no historical credibility. Although the Sacred Scriptures are primarily a religious book, they do contain a great deal of history and are examined by many historians as a reference to their own views. Over the years stories abounded about babies being killed in Bethlehem. Several sources believe the number was quite small. In 1883 Alfred Edersheim, an Orthodox Jew who became an Anglican priest, wrote **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah** in which he states...

As always in the history of Christ, so here also, glory and suffering appear in juxtaposition. It could not be, that these Magi should become the innocent instruments of Herod's murderous designs; nor yet that the Infant-Saviour should fall a victim to the tyrant. Warned by God in a dream, the 'wise men' returned 'into their own country another way;' and, warned by the angel of the Lord in a dream, the Holy Family sought temporary shelter in Egypt. Baffled in the hope of attaining his object through the Magi, the reckless tyrant sought to secure it by an indiscriminate slaughter of all the children in

Bethlehem and its immediate neighborhood, from two years and under. True, considering the population of Bethlehem, their number could only have been small, probably twenty at most.<sup>65</sup> But the deed was none the less atrocious; and these infants may justly be regarded as the 'protomartyrs,' the first witnesses, of Christ, 'the blossom of martyrdom.'.... The slaughter was entirely in accordance with the character and former measures of Herod.<sup>66</sup> Nor do we wonder that it remained unrecorded by Josephus, since on other occasions also he has omitted events which to us seem important.<sup>67</sup> The murder of a few infants in an insignificant village might appear scarcely worth notice in a reign stained by so much bloodshed. Besides, he had, perhaps, a special motive for this silence. Josephus always carefully suppresses, so far as possible, all that refers to the Christ<sup>68</sup> - probably not only in accordance with his own religious views, but because mention of a Christ might have been dangerous, certainly would have been inconvenient, in a work written by an intense self-seeker, mainly for readers in Rome.

The Catholic Encyclopedia speaks thus on the Massacre.

This cruel deed of Herod is not mentioned by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, although he relates quite a number of atrocities committed by the king during the last years of his reign. The number of these children was so small that this crime appeared insignificant amongst the other misdeeds of Herod. Macrobius ...relates that when Augustus heard that amongst the boys of two years and under Herod's own son also had been massacred, he said: "It is better to be Herod's hog [ous], than his son [houios]," alluding to the Jewish law of not eating, and consequently not killing, swine. (Later references identify this son as the adult son of Herod whom he had killed for aspiring to the throne.) Reference: [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)

In her visions on the life of the Blessed Virgin, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich tells how Herod lured Hebrew families to Jerusalem under the pretense of rewarding their fruitfulness. On arriving the men were sent home and the women were imprisoned in two adjacent buildings with a huge courtyard between them. Soldiers tore the children from their mothers' arms, took them to the courtyard and stabbed them to death, throwing their bodies on a heap to be buried in a trench later. Herod looked on. One can only imagine "the weeping of Rachel for her children who are no more" in the screams and cries of these women so alone without their husbands. Blessed Anne Catherine tells how Elizabeth and Zachary had been warned by an angel and by a messenger from Mary to flee the area. Elizabeth took John the Baptist to a cave in the wilderness where he became so familiar with life there, he stayed, never to be contaminated by the world. **While we can be quite sure the Massacre took place, we cannot know for sure how many babies were actually killed. We can picture Herod's demonic delight in their deaths. The deed was atrocious, as is the murder of innocent babies in the womb in the evil business of abortion today.**

On December 28<sup>th</sup>, around 485, the Western Church established the feast of the Holy Innocents as the first martyrs for Christ, they who died not only for Christ but in His place. St. Matthew connects the weeping of these poor mothers with that of Rachel, wife of Jacob, who was buried in Ramah where the remnants of the nation of Israel were gathered after the destruction of Jerusalem and before being led away into the Babylonian captivity. Rachel was weeping from her grave for the children of Israel and for the banishment of the Messiah, son of David, who would be led away, too, from his homeland to exile in the pagan land of Egypt. Rachel is a figure of Mary, weeping for her children today. Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil believed the murder of these holy innocents today by their own parents and by doctors and nurses is an evil so heinous to God that His judgment is falling upon America and all nations that condone this evil. Our Lady spoke of chastisements hitherto unknown to us being visited upon our land if we do not embrace a reform of life and turn away from such sin.

The world Jesus was born into was beset by wars, ruthless rulers, oppression of the poor, idolatry and adultery and impurity of every kind. Jesus came into this world precisely to save it. He comes again into our world, not much different than His, to establish a new kingdom in the interior of our hearts, the only place where true peace can reign. Our Lady of America gives us strong warnings about the insidiousness of evil and the many errors and false teachings that abound in our day. Herod's evil deeds were so manifold and so public there was no way one could not know them. Today evil doers parade and boast of their sins in the market place and build temples to Satan to mock the Almighty God. Satan creates hell on earth while Jesus comes to give us a taste of heaven to sustain us in the battle against Satan's elusive power.

**Dear child, evil is so insidious that it often passes for good. The simple and pure of heart alone can detect the difference. Many good works and many a good person or persons are thwarted and destroyed by apparently good people who are manipulated by the powers of evil because they do not possess that finer sense of being able to detect a false spirit from a true one.** (Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, Our Lady of America, Fostoria, OH, Pg. 40, April 18, 1981.)

**Weep, then, dear children, weep with your Mother over the sins of men.**  
(The Diary, Pg. 34.)

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