

**SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY ~ THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND THE MARTYRDOM OF
THE HOLY INNOCENT CHILDREN ~ Matt. 2:13-23**

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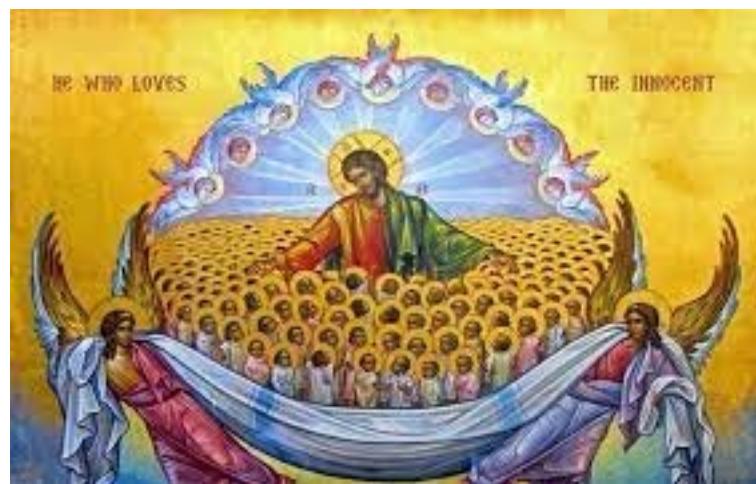
Greetings to everyone as we continue our celebration of the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ! Christ is born! Glorify Him! None of us should be surprised that in the midst of our joy and happiness we hear that Herod, who was the King of Judea, lost his senses and reacted with madness and hatred when he was informed that the messiah, the Savior of the world had been born. Since that time and even today there have been and continue to be modern day Herods, such as Lenin, Stalin and Krushchev, who hated Christ and sought to destroy the Church. Stalin was helpless in the face of the great popularity of Christmas, so he managed to secularize the holy day and instead turned it into a celebration of the New Year. This practice still lingers today, and in Russia New Year's day is an extremely huge and popular holiday. Of course all of us celebrate the secular New Year, but I don't know of any other culture or country that has assigned so much importance to this holiday like the Russians. Christianity today is the most persecuted religion in the world. This rejection of the Lord in no way mitigates the joy, faith and peace of "all men of good will" who are celebrating the coming into the world of our Savior. Herod knew that this was no ordinary child and that the blessing of God was upon Him. Herod knew that God sent a mystical and supernatural star to guide three wise men so that they might adore the new-born King of Israel. Yet Herod defied logic and refused to accept the inevitable. His arrogance and insatiable thirst for power and glory blinded him to the reality that he was no match for the power and will of God. How many rulers have come and gone in this world, like a second Herod, and thought that they could challenge God? Christianity survived the severe persecutions in Russia, and today the Russian Orthodox Church is building new churches, because in Russia today Christianity is growing and there is a need for more churches. By the same token, a pathetic wax effigy of Lenin lies in a mausoleum in the Kremlin, a sad reminder of the man who initiated the most severe persecutions in the history of the Church. Herod refused to reason and think in a sensible manner. He felt threatened when he heard that a potentially rival king had been born, and he feared that his earthly power would diminish and perhaps be completely taken away from him. He resorted to mad ploys and plots and seethed with rage and fury. Part of Herod's family had converted to Judaism, and Herod himself considered himself to be a Jew, although his lifestyle and brutality in no way resembled the prototype of a pious Jewish ruler. As a result, he was detested by the Jews that he was supposed to serve and care for. Herod's initial plan was to slay the Christ Child — sheer madness. At first he asks the wise men to reveal to him the location of the Divine Child, claiming that he also wanted to pay homage to Him. The wise men, however, understood very well Herod's intentions. They therefore ignored his request and returned directly home after adoring and worshipping the Christ Child. St. Matthew narrates that Herod then flew into "a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under" (Matt. 2:16). Did he really think that this would solve his problem and that in doing so he could possibly be able to kill the Son of God? Yes, our Savior, was eventually executed on a cross, but it was no ordinary cross, and His execution took place only when it was expedient and permitted by God as the climax of His ministry to save mankind. Prior to the crucifixion many attempts were made to kill Jesus, but He always walked away from death, because as is recorded in the Gospel, "His time had not yet come" (John 7:30).

We see Herod exhibiting a similar madness in Acts chapter 12. Herod had the Apostle Peter arrested and imprisoned. While Peter and his guards slept, an angel of the Lord came to him in the prison. The angel awakens Peter and releases him from the chains that bound him. The angel, in a supernatural way, opens the locked iron gate of the prison and leads Peter to

freedom. The sentries who surrounded Peter were sleeping and unaware of what had transpired. Obviously, the sentries who were responsible for guarding Peter were as perplexed as anyone else as to how it was possible that Peter could have been released from the chains and how it was possible that the locked gate to the prison could have been opened, especially without their being aware of it. If they had deliberately released Peter (and why would they do that?) or, if they were negligent in their duties, then why did they remain behind and not flee for their lives? The sentries were guilty of no crime or lack of diligence in their duties.

Nonetheless, after the sentries were interrogated, Herod, no doubt feeling that no matter what nature of facts or circumstances surrounded Peter's "escape", the sentries on duty were responsible and he had them executed. Justice was not in Herod's vocabulary. Josephus the historian informs us that Herod died from a putrid disease and suffered a very painful death. He suffered so much that he tried to take his own life. Herod's ending was just as awful as the life he had led. The Holy Apostle Paul tells us, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

We often hear of the event in today's Gospel as "the massacre of the innocents." As with everything else that we believe in, there are skeptical scholars who doubt the veracity of this event. Our faith tells us that Herod did indeed order the massacre of these innocent children. These children were more than massacred, they were *martyred*, and each one of them is robed with the snow white garment of salvation. They are among the ranks of the millions and millions of pious Christian souls who have suffered and continue to suffer on account of Christ and our holy faith. Holy innocent martyred children pray unto God for us! Amen.



THE HOLY 14,000 INNOCENT MARTYRED CHILDREN