

When the Baby Patrol Failed

Isaiah 60:1-6 & Matthew 2:1-23

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W. Colfax Ave., South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Isaiah 60:1-6 (NIV)

¹“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴“Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. ⁵ Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. ⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

Matthew 2:1-23 (NIV)

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.” ²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

When the Baby Patrol Failed

In every war, whether in Gaza or Nigeria or in the drug wars of Honduras and Guatemala, children are always the most vulnerable victims. But every once in a while, you read something that gives you hope.

William B. Breuer, in his book *Bizarre Tales from World War II*, tells an amazing story. It happened six weeks after D-Day. Lieutenant General George S. Patton's U.S. Third Army was headed eastward from their landing at Normandy toward Nancy, France, a city of some 200,000 people.

As Patton's army neared the city, many worried parents sent their young children to a school outside of Nancy as a safety precaution. Unbeknownst to these parents, and to Patton's troops, this action caused more than eighty Nancy children, between the ages of two and six, to be left in a no-man's-land between American and German forces.

A Third Army company commander, Captain George Schneider, became aware of this potentially disastrous situation, and he called for volunteers for the dangerous task of rescuing these helpless kids. Then Schneider and ten volunteers slipped into the blackness of no-man's-land and headed for the school, a half mile ahead. The GIs expected to be raked by machine-gun fire at any moment, but they arrived safely at their destination.

The patrol stole into the dark building, where they were greeted by four French nurses who had been taking care of the youngsters. By the light of two candles, the children gawked at the apparitions that had suddenly appeared out of the ominous night. There were only a few whimpers, even when artillery muzzle blasts shook the building.

Almost as if the scenario had been rehearsed many times, each soldier cradled two of the tiny kids in his arms. Other small tikes rode piggyback on the GIs. The older children grabbed tightly to the soldiers' jackets and web-belts. In single file the group moved out of the building.

Moments later a flare from one combatant or the other turned the landscape into daylight. The GIs flopped to the ground, careful not to hurt the children. Shells began crashing around them—but not one child cried or let out a scream. Perhaps they were too bewildered and frightened to even utter a sound.

When the flare's iridescence subsided, Captain Schneider called out in a stage whisper, "Let's go." After trudging in the darkness for a few hundred yards, the Americans heard a voice call out: "Halt, who goes there!" Schneider softly gave the password, and the procession continued into the American positions.

Soon the group arrived at a field hospital, and the begrimed, bearded, nearly exhausted soldiers tenderly put the sleepy children to bed. After daylight, the children were back with their parents. The "Baby Patrol" had been unique. American soldiers risked their lives to save these frightened children they had never known and would never see again.

What a wonderful story of courage and humanity in the midst of the horror of war. We could only wish there had been a "baby patrol" available in Judea two thousand years ago when Herod sent out his order that all of the boy infants in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under were to be slain.

You know the story. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi, Wise Men from the east, came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star...and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

Of course, Herod had no desire to worship this new-born king, but wanted instead to kill the young child. Herod was such an insecure man that he was fearful even of a tiny baby.

You know how the story ends. After they had heard the king, the magi went on their way, and the star they had seen went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

If the story ended there, there would be no problem. It is part of the most beautiful story ever told. But it didn't end there, and so we have a story of unspeakable horror. Every male child in the area of Bethlehem two and under was killed at the order of this demented king.

IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBT THAT THE PEOPLE WHO SAT IN GREAT DARKNESS KNEW WHAT DARKNESS WAS ALL ABOUT, HERE IS THE EVIDENCE: TINY CHILDREN WERE SLAIN BECAUSE OF AN INSANE MONARK'S FEAR AND LUST FOR POWER.

If we could say this terrible act of violence was an isolated event, we could slide over this dark moment, but we know better. Throughout history human beings have been guilty of such atrocities. If we could ease our troubled minds with the thought that humanity has evolved since that primitive time, we could move on to happier events in the scripture, but again we know better. The ovens of Auschwitz are less than a century behind us. The massacre at Mai Lai is within the lifetime of many members of this congregation.

There is still darkness in the human heart. We see it in the treachery of terrorists in the Mideast. We see it in the horrible acts of violence that take place with regularity in our own land—domestic violence, violence aimed at children in our schools, drug and gang shootings in our inner cities. And we see it in the actions of King Herod.

Dr. Tom Long tells a gripping story in his book *Shepherds and Bathrobes*. It concerns a photograph which hangs on a museum wall in the concentration camp at Dachau. A mother and her little girl are being taken to the gas chamber at Auschwitz. The girl doesn't know where she is going or what will happen to her. Her mother, walking behind her, knows all too well. Tragically, however, there is nothing the mother can do to protect her daughter, or herself, and so she does the only loving thing she can do. She places her hand over her little girl's eyes so at least she will not have to see the horror which awaits her.

Dr. Long writes, "When people see this picture in the museum they do not move quickly, or easily, to the next one. You can feel their emotion, almost hear their cries, 'O God, don't let that be all there is.

Somewhere, somehow, set things right.”

THAT IS WHAT THE CHRIST EVENT IS ALL ABOUT—SETTING THINGS RIGHT.

There is only one reason that Christ came into the world. That is so that the darkness that resides in the heart of humanity would be dispelled by the light of God’s love, and that includes the darkness in your life and mine. He came on our behalf.

Dr. Myron Augsburger tells of stopping to chat with a man on a bench years ago in Washington, D.C. Suddenly the man asked, “Are you a preacher?” Dr. Augsburger said, “Well, matter of fact I am.” And then, he says, the man almost sneered. He said, “Tell me, what difference does it make in my life that Jesus Christ died on a cross two thousand years ago?”

Dr. Augsburger thought for a moment, then asked, “Do you have friends?” “Yes,” the man said, “I have friends.” Dr. Augsburger said, “Suppose one gets in trouble.” The man said, “You hang in there with him.” Dr. Augsburger said, “Suppose it gets really severe.” The man said, “You still hang in there.” Dr. Augsburger said, “Suppose it gets really really rough. Then can you cop out?” The man looked at Augsburger in amazement and he said, “Man, if he’s your friend you never cop out.”

Then Dr. Augsburger smiled and said, “Well God came to us in Jesus as our friend because we were in trouble. And as our friend, Jesus hung in there with us. Then when our trouble got really difficult, Jesus still hung in there with us. After all, as our friend, when could Jesus ever cop out?”

The man looked at Dr. Augsburger, and it was almost as though lights went on in the man’s eyes. He smiled. Then he said, “You mean that is why Jesus had to die?”

Dr. Augsburger said, “That’s one reason. Jesus came and said, ‘Your problem is now my problem.’” The man got up from where he was sitting, squared his shoulders and nodded his head and turned and walked down the sidewalk.

Dr. Augsburger watched him go and said to himself, “Man, you don’t know it, but you have just been evangelized.” Once you know a God who says, “Your problem is now my problem,” you can never be the same.

Christ came into the world to drive out the darkness. To make our problem, His problem. To make the world’s problem His problem.

In 1999 there was a movie titled *Three Kings*, starring George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube. *Three Kings* is a brutal satire of the first Iraq War. It is an R rated film with much profanity and

violence, and yet it tells a heartening story. Four ethically challenged American soldiers find a map on the body of an Iraqi officer. They discover that it is a map to a bunker containing gold bullion stolen by Saddam Hussein's regime from Kuwait. These soldiers decide to steal the gold for their own use. When this decision is made, one of the soldiers begins to sing a crude adaptation of the familiar Christmas carol "We Three Kings of Orient Are." This is where the movie draws its title.

Along the way, these four ethically challenged soldiers wind up getting involved with a group of rebels including women and children fleeing from Saddam's regime. They get so involved with the rebels that these four soldiers, who set out to steal the gold so that they might live like kings, end up giving the gold away so that the rebels' lives might be spared.

Three Kings, unlike the Baby Patrol, is a work of fiction, but it does speak to something real and enduring. We may have darkness in our hearts, but it doesn't have to stay there. We may have darkness in the world, but it doesn't have to stay there either. Referring to Christ, John wrote in his Gospel, "In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (1:4-5)." That light still shines today and will one day fill the earth.

Our responsibility on this Day of Epiphany is to take that light of Christ out into the world. Will you join me in doing your part? Will you show Christ's love to the world? Tell them Jesus sent you! He really did! And then tell them that Jesus loves them and wants them to follow Him, become a part of His family on earth, the Church. God bless and amen.

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