

The weeping cries of Rachel for her children, what's going on? Much to consider, with all these types, themes, foreshadows, promises of God, where a life is poured out so others may live and flourish.

The matriarch Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife. Rachel's longing for children culminates in the ultimate cost —she dies while giving birth to their 2<sup>nd</sup> son. Joseph was their first son. Her death marked by sacrifice, longing to not live to see her son. Before dying, she uttered her last words, **Ben-Oni, Son of my sorrow**. Jacob will call him Benjamin, **Son of my right hand**. Sorrow is swallowed by hope.

Jacob erects a monument over her tomb, turning a place of loss into a lasting testimony. Joseph, only 7 when his mom died, At 17 his brothers sold him into slavery and all that would unfold to Egypt and his descendant in Exodus.

When Jews were conquered and the destruction of the Temple, they stop at Rachel's grave, her identity as a yearning mother, gave the people fortitude as they passed by her on their way to exile, reassuring them God would keep His promise to return their children, family, what you heard today, Jeremiah 31.

Rachel, her family, more than any Biblical figure, connected to the exile and return to Jerusalem. Her sacrifice births ongoing influence. God fashions a mighty line from this final son Benjamin: King Saul, Mordecai, Queen Esther and St. Paul. From Rachel's grave emerges a tribe that supplies leadership, courage, gospel proclamation.

For generations, even at the time of Jesus, Rachel's monument, just outside Bethlehem, a geographical bookmark, reminding every traveler that covenant blessings often flows through costly suffering; remember both the cost and the covenant, encouraging faith as God brings blessing out of brokenness. God endears His people, as they remain faithful even when it costs dearly, know His Covenant, promises last forever.

Rachel's brief final verse resonates through Scripture, linking a mother's sacrificial death to a lineage of deliverers and, ultimately, the Savior. Her grave, marked to this day. Rachel's death, Jesus' birth at Bethlehem ties her story to the grand arc of redemption, where the sacrificial birth occurs for the sake of eternity for God's children.

That brings us to today. There's not much joy that surpasses the birth of a child. There's not much sadness that surpasses the death of a child. We've celebrated the joy of Christmas birth. Today, sadness of death intrudes. The Holy Innocents, they're called, Rachel's descendant. All the baby boys in Bethlehem 2 and under, run through by swords by order of a fanatical King Herod who'd do whatever it takes to keep his throne, see the Child as a threat.

King Herod, murdered not just Bethlehem's boys, also killed his wife, 3 sons, family; he had many prominent men gathered and executed at the time of his death to ensure there'd be much mourning throughout the land when he died. Evil man.

So today, sin intrudes on our Christmas story. The "Silent Night" we sang about just a few nights ago in candlelight, is broken by the sound of soldiers marching boots, lamentation and bitter weeping of Rachel's mothers, for her children, unrequited comfort, the evil work of a tyrant king. Not exactly a Hallmark moment. Doesn't seem like a Merry Christmas does it? Perhaps it'd be more "Christmassy" to ignore the Holy

Innocents -or at least talk about it some other time. But no. The Church always proclaims the brutal reality of the truth. For only the truth about evil, sin and our Savior can give the hope, the joy that you crave.

Satan does not cease to attack during the 12 days of Christmas season. Those Bethlehem boys were attacked simply because they resembled Christ. And that is why you too are attacked. For baptized into His Name, by faith connected to Christ, robed with Christ, His righteousness, you too the enemy. “Little Town of Bethlehem” of greeting cards and carols becomes “ground zero” in Satan’s attack, warfare against Christ, His Church. But you are safe, His child. Mourning is turned to joy. Satan along with evil men cannot truly harm you nor take what is yours. For you the Christ is born.

Songs of peace ring out on Bethlehem hills and Jerusalem on holy week. The true peace Jesus establishes between heaven and earth, between God and man. Peace that comes only through forgiveness, your **adoption as sons** of God. For this peace, and joy, hope that transcends the sorrows of this life and world; that doesn’t ignore them, but sees us through the struggles, as we pray **deliver us from evil**, knowing your Savior is come; your Father keeps all His promises. Places of grief for His children become monuments of hope as the Lord weaves sorrow into His redemptive story.

It might seem unfair the Bethlehem boys died as Jesus might escape, it’s actually the other way around. He will give His life for them. That though they weren’t longer in the arms of their mothers, they be cradled in the arms of our Father. That though they seemed to die, yet they live! A life even greater than the one they lost. A life that cannot be cut down in youth or old age, life of an eternal Christmas with their Father in heaven.

The boys of Bethlehem weren’t lost any more than you’ve lost any loved ones in Christ. Their mothers find comfort in the wounds of Jesus. They’ve been reunited with their sons, never separated again! Already now, after maybe 40 long years of grief here on earth without their babies, they’ve enjoyed over 2000 years in perfect bliss.

So too, **in the fullness of time**, Christmas for you –you receive **adoption as child and heir**, spoken by St. Paul, the **Holy Spirit dwells in you, you cry out, Abba, Our Father** –joined to the Christ, His death in the waters of Holy Baptism (as you see with Lucia) raised to a new life, a dear child of God, a gathering of Holy innocent ones, in forgiveness of sins. A new life that however, whenever, wherever our life here ends, you be cradled in the arms of our Father in heaven.

The Holy Innocents today don’t spoil the spirit of Christmas, but teach us something about Christmas. Though they don’t sing like the angels, bring gifts like the magi, nor worship like the shepherds –nevertheless, in them you see yourself, your family, your brothers, dear child to Him. Jeremiah 31 still rings true! A few verses later you’ve God declare an eternal New Covenant in His blood. As, the Holy Innocent One –=sacrificed His life, poured out His blood that others, you may live and flourish to eternity. Even if we didn’t have Micah’s prophecy, so fitting, Jesus needs to be in Bethlehem, born in the very shadow of Rachel’s tomb. Rachel’s words ring out as her descendant, the only Son, is called a **man of sorrows** even now, **Son at the right hand** of the Father for you. Even more He says this is the new covenant that you partake His life that you cannot die. A truly Merry ChristMass, for Rachel, her children, descendants, Lucia, you, as the Lord fulfills His promises to take care of you –not just for now, but for eternity.