



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: The Slaughter of Innocents

Talking to the Kids

Jesus was born during the reign of a very evil person named Herod. Herod was jealous of anyone who he thought might challenge his power.

While Herod was known for murdering people (even his own sons), this story in Matthew's Gospel does not have any evidence that it actually happened.

Still, this story helps us to understand God's presence in times of suffering and tragedy. We are reminded that the plans of evil people is not what God wants. God does not want people suffering because some ruler is jealous or gets angry.

God does not want people suffering because of natural disaster or famine or any other reason.

Jesus provides us hope that even when we experience suffering, there is hope that God's love and promise of eternal life gives us hope.

Week 1: Matthew chapters 1 and 2

- This story is problematic when we read it as reporting factual information. The problems include great moral dilemmas about the nature of God. Why does God only warn one family of the impending tragedy? Why does God let those soldiers commit the tragedy?
- Through the centuries, people trying to defend the faith (known as Apologists) have come up with lots of answers trying to demonstrate why God is not at fault with this story, why saving Jesus was the greater good, how others just didn't hear God's angel warn them, or other callous and insufficient answers.
- This story of human tragedy confronts every inadequate theological response with the simple, "If God is so (loving/powerful/etc) then why?" And to some extent we need to be left sitting in that unanswerable "why". Just as we sit with someone who has lost a loved one at a tragically young age, or to a random act of violence, or sudden accident. It is not sufficient to say, "This is God's plan"; we cannot say, "God needed another angel." There is a longer list of things we should not say. When sometimes just sitting and being okay with no answer is what is needed.
- The story that is presented in these introductory chapters for Matthew's Gospel is not reporting factual information, thankfully. There is no evidence that this event ever took place. Matthew uses this story to set up themes that will be found across the whole of his Gospel.
- Jesus, and the Kingdom of God that he represents, is at odds with human authority and the kingdoms of this world. The kingdoms of this world represent violence, retribution, jealousy, and other forms of corruption. The kingdom of God is a place of love, forgiveness, gentleness, humility, kindness, grace. When these two kingdoms clash, the human kingdoms have the physical might to exert power and even cause great tragedy. But God's kingdom has the authority of eternal life, which certainly is experienced in what comes after death; but ultimately is experienced here and now as well.
- Matthew is also making theological connections in this story with the story of Israel found in the Old Testament. Abraham and his family came to the promised land, but after generations the tribes that would become Israel were in Egypt, and again after many generations, would be brought out of Egypt to return back to Israel. Jesus mirrors the journey to Egypt, Jesus' baptism mirrors the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, and Jesus' temptations in the wilderness mirrors the Israelites 40 years wandering the wilderness before returning home.
- So, yes, this story presents us with great ethical and moral questions about the nature of God, but this story also presents us with the foundation for understanding the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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