

Matthew 2:13-18 - He Placed Himself in the Middle of it

You ever had one of those really bad dreams that feel so real. And when you wake up, you're so relieved that that dream is not the reality of things. I had one of those a couple nights ago. I almost think it's God's way of leading us to be more thankful for the blessings he gives us.

Joseph knows how that feels. He snapped his eyes open in the middle of the night. An angel came to him in a bad dream with the worst news: "*Mary, get up! Get Jesus! We have to get out of here – Herod going to try to kill our son!*"

When the wise men told Herod that a Savior had been born King of the Jews, he wasn't singing "Joy to the World". No Herod was threatened. So much so that he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under.

Now, Bethlehem wasn't a big city; there weren't many people living there. The best guess? Fifteen, maybe twenty boys aged two or under. Fifteen or twenty homes where Herod's soldiers went in with their swords to end the lives of little boys whose moms and dads had no idea why this was happening. A horrible story isn't it?

What surprises you most about it? That a powerful king like Herod would feel the need to murder so many innocent children? Maybe not if you knew him – Herod was ruthless. He killed some of his own sons and wives when he thought they were threats. That Herod would look at Jesus' birth as bad news isn't a surprise. That Herod tried to kill Jesus isn't a surprise.

To me, that might be the most surprising part of this story, is that Jesus knowingly put himself right in the middle of it. Maybe you noticed it when we read Matthew's account from the worship folder. Two times Matthew quoted the Old Testament prophets – "*and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet.*" In other words, God always knew this was going to happen. He saw this disaster coming all along. And he let it. And that's one of the hardest truths – and one of the most wonderful truths – there is.

It's hard to know that even though Christ is King, even though God has power over everything, and even though God promises that he hates evil and hates suffering and doesn't want any of it to take place, he still allows it in the world. For now.

He let Herod carry out that terrible sin against those young children, just as he lets some really hard things happen in your life and in the lives of those you love. Not only is that a hard truth to accept, but it's also an exhausting truth for Christians.

Living in a world in which terrible things happen is exhausting. Seeing the tragedies that happen in the lives of God's children in this very congregation is exhausting. And maybe it's so exhausting because God knows about it and just lets it happen.

But at the same time, Christians, that's one of those most revitalizing truths. Where was Jesus when all of this sadness and death was going on? **Right in the middle of it.** With the power that cast the stars into the sky but as helpless as a little child, the King of the Universe fled in the middle of the night from the King of Judea. The pain of sin didn't stop Jesus from coming – he put himself right in the middle of the tears and the hardships and the death we face. In fact those things are the reason he came.

That's why we remember something as awful as this event, even on Christmas Day. It reminds us that no matter how sad or cruel life can be, we have a Savior who knows our suffering and chose to come down to this earth and go through it, too.

He'll never fail in his plans for you. Oh there may still be days ahead when you might feel like *Rachel, weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted.* There may even be days when your tears are flowing because you've come face to face with the evil that lives in you. But look where Christ puts himself: **In the middle of it all,** so that one day you would never have to experience it again.

Joseph snapped his eyes awake in the middle of the night. An angel came to him in a bad dream with the worst news: "Mary, get up! Get Jesus! We have to get out of here – he's going to try to kill Jesus!" I can only imagine the thoughts that came into his mind as he looked at Jesus' face. "This baby, does he have any idea what kind of

evil lives in this world?” And I can only imagine the wonder that spread across his face as he remembered the words of the angels and prophets and realized, Of course he does. That’s why he came. It’s in his own name, “Jesus, he will save his people from their sins.” How much he must love us!

As you celebrate Christmas today, remember the Savior who put himself in the middle of all of it, so that whether you suffer from a bad dream, or a scary reality, you can find complete and total relief in the baby who escaped to Egypt, so he could grow up and be your savior. Amen