

Sunday 28 December 2025
The First Sunday of Christmas

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Jeremiah 31:15-17
NT: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
Gp: Matthew 2:13-23

Today is the Fourth Day of Christmas – the Feast of the Holy Innocents, when the light of the Christ child is contrasted so fiercely with the darkness of King Herod. The villain targets the defenceless children of Bethlehem in an attempt to wipe out the new born king about whom he has learned from the evidently not so ‘wise men’. In their naivete they remind me of those Western journalists and intellectuals invited to visit Stalin’s Soviet Union, for propaganda purposes. They were shown the factories being built, but not the gulags or the starving farmers. The regime in Moscow called them ‘Useful Idiots’. Often they were people who wanted to believe that the Russian Revolution had been a success, because they wanted to believe that communism was the future – a future of equality and plenty, a hope for heaven on earth, that we could achieve perfection, if only set free from old loves and loyalties, like religion.

Set in contrast to the wise men, and King Herod, is the Holy Family, escaping to Egypt, where there was a large Jewish community, right up to the twentieth century. And, then there are the babies of Bethlehem, who don’t escape. Their death brings the problem of human evil into focus at the very beginning of the Christian story – this isn’t an accidental or irrelevant detail, it brings home how far humanity needs God’s salvation. They’re not Useful Idiots, but ‘Holy Innocents’, because they tell the truth, about God, and humanity, even as they die.

The prophet Jeremiah, long before the time of Christ, had written with hope for the people of God in general, that he would not forsake them, even in times of exile; but it is applied to the story of the deaths of the Holy Innocents, by St Matthew. For these children, the traditional Jewish hope that their children or grandchildren might enjoy better days, in covenant with God, doesn’t apply. The Innocents’ deaths can only be seen in a hopeful light if there is life beyond death – and in that light the fact the baby Jesus escapes, but the others don’t, looks less like special treatment, and more like a foretaste of the cross and Easter Day, rooted in the reality of human frailty, and divine grace. Tidings of comfort and joy.

Fr Philip Anderson