

“The Grinch Who Tried to Steal Christmas”

Matthew 2:1-12

December 20, 2020

Many things try to derail our Christmas Hope, Peace, and Joy this year, but Love wins out. Love always wins out. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the faithful who await their Christmas Blessing in 2020.

Matthew 2:1-12:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory— this was during Herod’s kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We’re on pilgrimage to worship him.”

When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

They told him, “Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It’s you, Bethlehem, in Judah’s land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel.”

Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, “Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I’ll join you at once in your worship.”

Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So, they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Herod Antipas was a really awful guy. He was a puppet king, installed by Caesar Augustus as a puppet king of Judah after the death of his father, Herod the Great. His power was dependent on his ability to keep the Jews of Galilee under control.

Herod was not a real king, but he called himself one and ordered his subjects to refer to him with this title. He was a stone cold killer, though he had others do his dirty work for him. To use Grinch language, “he had a heart that was three sizes too small.”

Herod also was paranoid; he was constantly looking over his shoulder to see who might be gaining on him, who might be coming to steal his power away. It didn’t matter if his foe had amassed a formidable army as when Aretas went to war with him over territory they both claimed, or if his foe was a little baby soon to be born to a poor woman-child and her equally poor, powerless husband.

Herod did not rule by reason and he displayed no compassion toward his subjects. He was in it for himself and he did whatever he thought necessary to preserve his power.

When it was reported to him that some regal fellows from the East were looking for a special child, “The King of the Jews,” so as to bring him gifts and worship him, Herod’s ears perked up and he immediately labeled this newborn a threat.

Herod did what Herod always did when confronted with a perceived threat—he set out to eliminate it, to kill the child and prove that he—no one else- was the King over the Jews.

There was just one problem: Herod did not know the whereabouts of the child’s birth. He only knew of the prophecy that the child, the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem and that his birthplace would be marked by a star. His court scholars told him that Micah had foretold of the birth and that the child would be a shepherd who would rule the people of Israel, the Jews. This Herod could not have!

So, he tried to trick the Magi-- the Wise Men as we popularly call them- feigning that he, too, wanted to worship the newborn child. He ordered that as soon as they found the baby, they were to send word back to him of the star's location so he could join them at once in the adoration of this special child.

Like the Grinch, Herod only had his mind and shriveled little heart set on destroying that which threatened him. The allegory of the Grinch as it relates to the story of Herod is rather obvious. Herod tried to trick the Magi so that he could steal Christmas. The Grinch tricked the trusting people of Whoville so that he could steal their Christmas, too.

As Dr. Suess wrote in his famous parable of 1957, Mr. Grinch and his trusty, longsuffering but loyal dog, Max, dress up like Santa Claus and sneak down into Whoville on Christmas Eve. They successfully steal all the Christmas decorations, lights, and presents from the unsuspecting, sleeping inhabitants of the small town. Dragging his sled full of stolen items to the top of Mt. Crumpit, the Grinch is satisfied that he has destroyed the Whos' Christmas-- They would now be as miserable as he is.

But when dawn comes to Whoville, he is met not with sounds of sorrow-- cries, and broken hearts-- but with the Whos instead link arms around the bare center tree as they sing a joyful Christmas song of thanksgiving. His plan has been foiled.

Herod's plan is foiled, too, not by Cindy Lou Who's accepting heart, but by angels who warn the Magi in a dream not to report back to Herod. Herod faces off with Love, and Love wins. Herod of course, will think he has the last laugh some 33 years later, but we know of an alternate ending-beginning of the story of Jesus. We know that death is not the final answer, that life wins out over death and that Love wins out over hate.

We love the Grinch story, of course, because Love changes the curmudgeon in a way that Herod never allows. We weep with tears of joy when Cindy Lou Who takes

Grinch by the hand and leads him into the circle of worship where he too, sways back and forth and sings “Welcome Christmas” with the townspeople – “Fah who forayze! Dah who dorayze!”. His heart is said to “have grown three sizes that day.”

The Grinch will try to steal Christmas from us this year. Grinchy will keep our families away. Grinchy will keep our Christmas displays and lights tucked away under the stairs, for bah humbug, who will see them anyway and why should we put them out and put up a tree?

Grinch will keep you physically out of the church sanctuary, so why bother logging on this Christmas Eve? It won't be the same. We will miss lighting our candles and turning off the sanctuary lights while we sing our Fah who Forayze! Dah who dorayze! Silent Night traditional hymn. We won't eat pie together or give each other hugs, and we won't feel the cold outside against the warmth of a couple hundred bodies inside, so why try?

Our lights and our presents and our decorations will all stay packed away under the stairs, just like the Grinch likes it, so there will be no joy in Whoville. There will be no star shining bright on the hope of the faith, on the Christ-child, for Herod has found him and extinguished the Light of Christmas.

Or has he? The scriptures tell us NO. The scriptures show us the power of God's love and that Love is greater than any evil, any pandemic, any plot to snuff out light or steal Christmas from the people.

Love is the answer. Love cures the story. Love saves the child so he can grow up to save us with his Love. Love saves the Grinch so that he doesn't have to hide away anymore hating the Whos. Even Max the hapless dog will have his day!

See you Christmas Eve? We hope so.

“Fah who Forayze! Dah who dorayze., Welcome Christmas, Christmas Day.” Christmas WILL come this year and the world will again rejoice.

May it Be So

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