

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

2353 Rice Boulevard, Houston, TX 77005-2696 ctk@ctkelc.org ctkelc.org
713-523-2864 Telephone

10:00 a.m., Sunday, December 28, 2025

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

Baptism of Beatrice Elizabeth Hayes

Jeremiah 31:15-17; Psalm 124; 1 Peter 4: 12 -19; Saint Matthew 2: 13-18

In nomine Jesu!

About 1500 years ago, at the same time the Church began celebrating December 25 as Christmas, it also decided to surround the celebration of the newborn Christ Child by commemorating those they labeled “Companions of Christ,” those who, in his earthly life, were closest to Jesus. So, they gave December 26, the day after Christ’s Nativity, to the first person to be martyred after Jesus’ resurrection, Stephen, one of the first seven deacons. On the day after that, December 27, they chose to remember Jesus’ “Beloved Disciple,” John.” Finally, on the following date, December 28, today, they chose to remember the earliest and most tragic “companions” of Jesus: the boys of Bethlehem, two years old and younger who were the first, but certainly not last, “Holy Innocents” -, who, according to Matthew, Herod had murdered because they were born in the same place and at the same time, as the one born “king of the Jews,” narcissistic and paranoid Herod’s title, a title given to him by Caesar Augustus; a title he was always fearful he would lose.

By adding these “companions,” those early Christians sought to emphasize for us what Pastor Roschke proclaimed last Sunday: that Christ’s manger is never far from Christ’s cross and Christ’s cross is never far from Christ’s empty tomb. This is exactly what we proclaim today as we celebrate Beatrice Elizabeth’s baptism. For in the waters of baptism, birth, death, and new and eternal life are just as tightly bound together as Christ’s manger is to Christ’s cross, and Christ’s cross is to Christ’s – and Beatrice Elizabeth’s and our -resurrection. Through baptism, death has no power over us, even though we live amidst what we sadly recognize is “the waste of our wraths and sorrows.”

Herod's wraths, Rachel's sorrows, and innocents' deaths are on full biblical display today, as "the waste of our wraths and sorrows" are on full display to us daily. We can't close our eyes and pretend these aren't there. There still are, as there always have been, new Herods, Rachels, and innocent victims around us.

Fear-spawned, hate-filled officially-sanctioned cruelty, like Herod's, continues; innocents, like the boys of Bethlehem, still suffer; mothers, like Rachel, still weep because their children "are no more." Gaza today is not far from Bethlehem then. And Bethlehem today is no less occupied than Bethlehem then.

We all know this. We all lament this. We all abhor and reject this every time it happens. And we all pray, as we did in the beginning of this service, that God's "great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and... establish the rule of justice, love, and peace" here and now. After all we've seen and heard and continue to experience every day, we are, like the writer of First Peter, not surprised "at the fiery ordeal that is taking place... as though something strange were happening." Not surprised, but not afraid, paralyzed, or silenced either.

Beatrice Elizabeth's baptism tells us why: Because all these horrors, all these cruelties, then and now, never have been, never are, and never will be God's last word to us. Christ – God's "Word made flesh" for us always is, was, and will be; and that Word "made flesh" for us in Jesus Christ, always was, always is, and always will be God's Yes to every would-be Herod's No.

All this makes Beatrice Elizabeth, her parents, her family, and every one of us, with Stephen the deacon; John the Beloved, and every holy innocent companions of Christ in the best literal sense of that term – companions, those who together share bread – *com panis* - with Christ and one another; those who share bread with all who "hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Two things are true about us companions of Christ.

1. We live and shape our lives *baptismally*, that is, as if the only death we have to fear is already behind us; and the only life and resurrection are before us. That's what was promised to us when we were baptized. That's what we just promised to help Beatrice Elizabeth know, do, and live.

2. We strive to live faithfully and fearlessly, shaping our world into a place where Rachel need not weep because Herod's wrath is no more.

Fellow companions of Christ, let us commit ourselves to that way – Christ's way; and make the new year ahead a year of grace and peace, and not another year of wraths and sorrows.

Amandus J. Derr

Interim Senior Pastor