**Isaiah 63: 7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrew 2:10-18; Matthew 2: 13-20**

On Christmas eve we heard that Christmas is an experience of re-creation. From the sermon we reached to a point that; for us Christmas is to be understood as a verb rather than a noun. And hence we will celebrate it with a question; how are we Christmassing? But todays gospel passage raises a question, is it possible to celebrate Christmas when we see innocent children are crying? When we hear the cry of the innocent children and the innocent people, we must know that there are leaders in the world who rule their nations like the king Herod.

We see the terrifying and furious face of this king when the Magi brought gifts to the city of Bethlehem to see the new born king of the Jews. Their attempt to locate the birthplace of the new-born king led them to reach the palace, and this brutal king tried to handle the situation shrewdly and then brutally. This furious Herod reacted the way he was well known to react – with death.

When we read the Jewish history, we can understand that, although he had been named the king of the Jews by the Roman Senate, he was not a Jew. The history proves that he was an insecure leader and known for his fear and brutality. He had murdered some of his sons as he suspected that they would take over the kingship before he dies. He understood the fact that his own people were not respecting him. Therefore, he had made a decree that forty Jewish nobles should be brought to Jericho to be killed when he died, so that there would be enormous mourning throughout the land at his death. But that did not happen as his son decided not to carry out the final wish of his father.

The furious king Herod was too angry and suspicious in the disloyalty of the magi. He ordered to slaughter all infant boys in Bethlehem who were under two years old. It is because, the magi had told him that the star they had followed had appeared about two years earlier. Therefore, he ordered all boys two years and younger in Bethlehem to be killed in order to make sure that he didn’t miss the new-born king. But God protected his Son and told Joseph in a dream to take his family to Egypt. So, Joseph took his family and hurried to Egypt and stayed there until Herod died. It is a great nature of obedience to God we see in Joseph’s response. When he was informed about the will of God, without any further question he jumped out of his bed and left behind the comfort of his hometown and fled to an unknown land. Although he knew about the intensity of danger he had to face, he trusted God and decided to obey God’s will. He wholeheartedly accepted the role in participating in the mission of God. He was given the role of raising and protecting God’s own Son. When he began to carry out this responsibility, he started to face problems one by one. But amid all those obstacles, God’s continuous guidance and protection was with him and his family.

 When we are in God’s ministry his call comes to us to step out into the unknown. He knows very well what we can do for our church and our fellow beings. Can we obey the will of God like Joseph did? We must remain open to the thrilling and dangerous and exhilarating call God has upon our life, no mater where it leads. If we want the Lord to use us in great things, we need to be obedient in all things he tells us to do. Let us try to be obedient to God’s will, whatever the cost. We must know that obedience to God is blessed with God’s presence, power and protection.

The narration of this story relates to the story of baby Moses who was protected from Pharaoh’s slaughter of all new-born Hebrew boys in Egypt. The gospel writer also connects Joseph’s return from Egypt to the rescue of God’s people out of Egypt saying, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Again, Matthew connects the story of Jesus’ protection to God’s provision for his people throughout history.

Other connections can be made between Jesus as a refugee and God’s concern for refugees throughout the world as they try to protect their children from powerful forces. We all know the meaning of the term refugee. The United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention defined the term refugee, which says, “A refugee is someone who fled his/her home and country owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group.

On 4th September 2015 while I was going through the BBC online news, I read a heart-breaking news about an incident happened in the Mediterranean sea.

“Alan set out before dawn that morning from his home in Turkey with his father Abdullah, mother Rehanna, and five-year-old brother Ghalib. The Kurdis were trying to reach Canada to reunite with Abdullah's sister Tima, a hairdresser in Vancouver.

The family joined with a small group of refugees at the coast to attempt the 4km (2.5 mile) crossing to the Greek island of Kos. Abdullah texted Tima from the beach to say they were leaving. She passed that message to her dad in Syria. She sent a text message to him, "Abdullah is leaving now, pray for his safety."

But her prayers went unanswered. Minutes after they set off, the small boat carrying the family was hit by high waves and the captain fled. Abdullah Kurdi found himself fighting to save his two young boys. Of the 23 people in the group, 14 are believed to have died, including Abdullah's wife and sons.

Under darkness, the family's boat was pushed out into the waves. Within minutes they were in trouble. In heart-breaking detail, Abdullah described the moment his young family drowned.

"I tried to catch my children and wife but there was no hope. One by one they died," he said. "I tried to steer the boat, but another high wave pushed the boat over. That is when it happened.

"My kids were amazing. They woke me every day to play with me. I would love to sit next to the grave of my family now and relieve the pain I feel."

Tima, Alan Kurdi’s aunty in Canada cried out, "Please let's use our collective voices to make change and demand that our world leaders take action now to pass emergency refugee measures. Let's put an end to this suffering. Our hearts have been broken."

We see innocent people around us are suffering badly. One question has been bothering humankind since the beginning of history: how can God let innocent people suffer, while evil people thrive and prosper?

The slaughter of those young boys in Bethlehem was not God’s idea. It was Herod’s idea. He was not the only person of power who has slaughtered people for his own purposes. Surely, Rachel wept again when six million people died at the hands of Hitler’s Nazis in the 2nd world war. Millions of mothers are crying around the world as their children and loved ones dies in the conflict regions of Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Kurdish – Turkish conflict area, Libya, Iraq. Atrocities against children and people of all ages are just as real now as they were in Bethlehem.

In such situations, people ask, where is God? Answer is, God is with us. His lovingkindness and promises are true, and God comes to us when our pain is so deeper and severe. God’s presence will be manifested and experienced when we come alongside one another to shoulder our burden and raise our voices of prayers and justice. We bring a bit of heaven on earth each time we do so. If we are ready to accept his call to offer God’s presence God will anoint us and strengthen us to be his voice in a world where violence is frequent, and the divine wisdom and grace are rare. He will empower us and guide us to be the gentle presence of God for those who suffer violence and loss, to let them know that God is with them.