

# Christmas as Resistance

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HOPE  
PEACE  
JOY  
LOVE

Sunday, December 28, 2025

“Christmas as Resistance” | Matthew 2:13-23 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

I love Christmas. Family. Decorations. Food. Music. Candles. It's a beautiful time of year, when we celebrate God's love.

But Christmas isn't just about warm feelings, as we see if we read our Bible.

On Christmas Eve, we heard from Luke's gospel, where the first character in the Christmas story isn't a shepherd or an angel or an innkeeper or a baby.

It's the emperor, and the emperor wanted control and tax income, so Joseph and his family had to register.

The power of empire looms over the life of Jesus in Luke right from the beginning.

And today we turn to Matthew, where we'll see the power of empire in Herod, the local authority, who exercises total control.

This Sunday and next, we hear from Matthew chapter 2, where we see two very different reactions to the birth of Jesus.

The better known reading is next Sunday, Epiphany with the wise men, the magi, the ones looking for the new king, to worship him and then come with gifts for the new king.

They were worried about how King Herod would react, so they went home by another road.

If we're not paying attention and just sing “We Three Kings” and wonder what frankincense and myrrh are, we miss the import of that account: Jesus is a threat to the corrupt political powers of his day.

The lesser-known reading from Matthew 2 is the assigned reading for today, the first Sunday of Christmas, and it's not a tender, heartwarming Christmas story. In fact, it's one of the more tragic and barbaric accounts in scripture. Herod orders the massacre of baby boys, hoping to be rid of this Jesus. But Joseph had been warned in a dream, so Jesus, Mary, and Joseph escaped the brutality, fleeing for their lives.

As I read this tragic account, note the prominence of angels, scriptural fulfillment, and dreams.

This Sunday in some Christian traditions as the feast of the holy innocents. Listen for God's word, which comes even in a gruesome account like this.

<sup>13</sup> Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup> Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

<sup>16</sup> When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> "A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

<sup>19</sup> When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, <sup>20</sup> "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup> Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazarene."

On Christmas we rightly celebrate God's love for the world.

Christian faith is about learning and living God's love.

We focus on the greatest commandment: Loving God and neighbor.

We reflect on the fruits of the spirit: love joy peace patience kindness generosity  
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal 5:22-23)

We encourage each other to be kind and compassionate and generous, in the spirit of Jesus.

Being a Christian isn't simply about being nice.

Our faith also entails confronting the reality of evil in the world.

Evil comes in many forms.

I don't believe in a literal devil with horns and a pitchfork but I do believe that forces of evil get inside us as individual and inside our systems.

Our gospel reading today tells of a king who was so threatened by baby Jesus that he ordered the wholesale murder of baby boys. That's evil.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray: "deliver us from evil."

At the conclusion of Ephesians, Paul says:

our struggle is ... against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6.12)

In Psalm 23, we read:

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil, for you are with me;

Our gospel reading today certainly reflects evil, in the opposition to Jesus at his birth. That opposition continues throughout his ministry.

In the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, he proclaims the coming kingdom of God and calls four fishermen to follow. It's a foundational text for us, but there is a parenthetical note at the outset, which we miss if we're not paying attention: John the Baptist is arrested, apparently as a threat to the power of the state.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

And we know that eventually Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified.

We don't talk a lot about evil generally our lives are free of direct exposure to the evils that too many of the world's people experience now and through history.

The principles of our faith acknowledge the reality of evil and call us to resist it. Sometimes I think we miss these principles, because those of us who live in relative comfort have the luxury of spiritualizing the evil.

But it's real.

On this day when the gospel reminds us that Jesus was a refugee and that he and Mary and Joseph had to flee for their lives from the power of a brutal empire, it seems appropriate to remember that one form of suffering in our world is how many people have been forced to leave their homes.

One manifestation of evil is the reality of refugees, in the time of Jesus and continuing through today.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, as of June 2025 there are 42.5 million refugees, people living outside their country, because of political, religious, and economic turmoil. In addition, there were 67.8 million people displaced within the borders of their own countries.

Just to put a face on refugees and help us think about one manifestation of the reality of evil in our world, here are the UNHCR photos of the year.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/photo-of-the-year-top-refugee-photos-from-2025/>



So, we acknowledge and sometimes experience the reality of evil in the world.

And as God's people, we're called to resist it. Calls to resist are in our foundational documents.

The first question we ask new members:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

In our constitution, the Book of Order, there is a short list of themes of our reformed tradition. One of them is about idolatry and tyranny and the call to transform society.

The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God. (F-2.05)

If all of that is too complicated, the clear words of Paul make sense. At the end of Romans 12, one of the best books in the Bible, we read: Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12.21)

When Jesus was born, the angels sang a song of peace and goodwill for everyone, which was like the first song of resistance to the power of empire.

Other songs do the same helping us in our efforts to resist evil and in our call to faithful living as disciples of Jesus.



Last spring, during the season of Easter, we sang a verse of “God of Grace, God of Glory” every Sunday, to encourage each other to be wise and courageous in challenging times.

“Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days.”

A Chinese Christian wrote “O Christ the Great Foundation” in 1933 in the wake of World War I and as the horrors of World War II were on the horizon. The third verse was appropriate then and still today, recognizing the reality of tyranny and evil, along with the church’s call to respond.

Where tyrants' hold is tightened,  
where strong devour the weak,  
where innocents are frightened,  
the righteous fear to speak,  
there let your church awaking  
attack the powers of sin  
and, all their ramparts breaking,  
with you the victory win.

Let us pray: Dear God, thank you for the birth of Jesus, the one who comes with hope, peace, joy, and love for the world. Grant us wisdom and courage and strength for faithful living today. Help us to overcome evil with good and to seek first your kingdom. Amen.