**Now and Forever (1-1-17)**

Isaiah 63:7-9 Hebrews 2:10-18 Matthew 2:13-23

Time and time again throughout the salvation history of God’s people, we see Isaiah’s pattern. God calls and establishes a special, holy nation to represent God and witness to divine love among the nations. Created to be royalty and priests, made to bless and enrich the created world, God’s people are more sons and daughters than servants or friends. God says, “They are my people, sons who will not deal falsely.”

God loves them and suffers as His children suffer, afflicted by their afflictions, and the angel of God’s presence (who will be born as Jesus) saves them. Yet, the kids rebel. They do deal falsely: with God, with each other, and with the Earth itself, exploiting resources selfishly instead of multiplying blessings.

So, the Lord shows his people the consequences of a godless life by withdrawing His divine presence and everyone suffers. The people finally notice this ruinous cycle, repent, and God restores His family, personally taking the pain, temptation, and death into Himself. Hebrews points out that Jesus’ birth and death makes sense “for both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father.”

 We are brothers and sisters, to Jesus, to each other, and to Earth because we share the same blood, shed for us and sanctifying us in Communion. And finally, this is what we see happening in that terrible time when Herod’s soldiers hunt for the holy family and kill so many innocent boys, trying to end Jesus’ life before his ministry begins.

 “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachael weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.” The last time I preached, my message was that we are waiting, often in a grief like Rachael’s that will not be comforted since the right time for God’s kingdom to come on Earth has not yet come. The point was: be patient, that time will come.

 I asked, since we believe in universal salvation and sanctification, “Well, must we then wait till every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?” My answer, prophetically, was, “Yes.”

 To that, as a new year has begun, I must remind you that our waiting is far from passive. The children of God are called to live as such: to lift Christ up and draw all people to the Gospel. This is a call to evangelism and hospitality.

 So, as this New Year begins, I need to risk another prophecy: “Behold, the voice of Rachael in Ramah will become a song of joy, for she will be comforted and her children, which were but dry bones shall live again, now and forever.” Hallelujah and Amen!