



CHRISTMAS 1

Dec 28, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

THE SERMON: “A Savior Born into a Broken World”

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction — “A Lousy Christmas”

When I turn on the news—war in Ukraine, starvation in Gaza, families fleeing violence with nothing but what they can carry—I catch myself thinking, *“What a lousy Christmas for those families.”*

And then, if I’m honest, I do something even worse. I keep watching. Another headline. Another clip. Another half hour of tragedy scrolling by. Then I turn off the TV, watch a Hallmark movie, answer emails—and go about my day as if none of it touched me.

But it *did* touch me. I just don’t want to feel it. And when the images return—children stolen by war, families torn apart, mothers and fathers weeping—I want to push them away.

I don’t want to hear about the bad news. Not now. It’s Christmas. This is supposed to be joyful. We want Christmas lights without shadows. Carols without tears. Joy without grief.

But then we hear today’s Gospel—the story of the **Holy Innocents**—and something unsettling breaks through our carefully curated holiday mood: Christmas has always lived in the shadow of suffering. We want Christmas without blood on the ground. Scripture refuses to give us that.

Psalm 148 — Joy That Survives Reality

So let’s try to make Christmas “biblical” the way we prefer it.

Let's sing Psalm 148: "Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!" Now *that* sounds like Christmas. Cosmic praise. Joy bursting from every corner of creation. Angels, stars, skies, and seas joining the song.

But here's the twist we often miss: Most scholars believe Psalm 148 was written **after the Exile**—after Jerusalem had been destroyed, after families had been deported, after lives had been shattered. These people aren't praising God because life is easy. They're praising God because **God brought them home**. Their joy isn't denial. It's **resilience**.

Modern psychology is finally catching up to what Israel already knew: gratitude builds resilience. Thankful people endure. Gratitude doesn't erase trauma—but it helps people survive it.

So why is it that Christians are so often labeled as grim, judgmental, or joyless? That's not the psalmist. That's not biblical faith.

The psalmist praises because he knows something crucial: **God did not abandon them—even when they failed God**. Praise becomes an act of resistance. Joy becomes defiance against despair.

Isaiah 63 — Gratitude in the Rubble

Isaiah picks up that same melody as he proclaims to the returning Jewish exiles: "I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has done for us."

If I had been standing there, surveying the rubble, I wouldn't be praising. I'd be complaining. "Where's the Temple?" "Where are the walls?" "The vineyards are dead. The fig trees are barren." "If God loves us so much, why does everything look like this?"

But Isaiah refuses to romanticize the past—or despair over the present. He remembers something deeper: "It was no messenger or angel, but God's presence that saved them... in God's love and mercy, God redeemed them; God lifted them up and carried them." Not from a distance. Not through intermediaries. **God Himself carried them**.

Maybe the problem isn't that we lack reasons to be grateful. Maybe we just haven't practiced gratitude when life is unfinished. Gratitude isn't

pretending everything is fine. It's trusting that God is still at work—even in the rubble.

Hebrews — A God Who Knows Suffering

That brings us straight to Hebrews—and to the heart of the Christian claim. God does not save us from a safe distance. “(God) did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham... Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect.”

In Jesus, God says: “You think you're suffering? I know.” God didn't bypass pain. God entered it. This is why Christianity cannot be reduced to “just another spiritual path.”

No other faith proclaims a God who became flesh, suffered, died—and defeated death **from the inside**. Jesus didn't cheat death. He went through it.

And because of that, Hebrews makes this staggering claim: “Through death he destroyed the one who has the power of death... and freed those who were held in slavery by the fear of death.” Fear does not get the final word. Death does not get the last sentence.

The cross stands at the center of Christmas—not as a spoiler, but as a promise.

Matthew — Christmas with Blood on the Ground

Which brings us back to Matthew—and the hardest truth of Christmas. Herod is terrified of losing control. And fear, when it grips power, always turns violent.

Children die because a king is afraid. Why weren't all the parents warned? Why didn't God intervene sooner? I don't know. But I do know this: God did not choose violence. Herod did. And there are still Herods in our world—using fear to dominate, dehumanize, and destroy. Christmas does not ignore that reality. It exposes it.

And still—God acts. Jesus survives. Love continues. Redemption unfolds. Evil does its worst—and fails to stop God's promise.

The Call — “Fear Not”

Franklin Roosevelt once said, “*We have nothing to fear but fear itself.*” History keeps proving how hard that is.

But Christmas dares to say something even deeper: Fear does not get the final word. That's what Mary heard. That's what Joseph heard. That's what the shepherds heard. "Fear not... for I bring you good news of great joy."

Not because everything makes sense. Not because suffering disappears. But because **God has come near**.

We may not have every answer. We may not understand why innocents suffer. But we know this: God is not the author of fear. God is love. And God has entered our world.

Conclusion — Praise in the Dark

So even with Ukraine. Even with Gaza. Even with grieving parents and broken systems—We still dare to sing: "Praise the Lord from the heavens... sun and moon... shining stars..." Not because the world is whole. But because **God has entered it**.

A Savior has been born to us—not above suffering, not beyond pain, but **with us**. That is Christmas. Christmas declares that God does not watch human misery from a safe distance. God enters it. God takes it on. God is with us.

So we do not ask, "*What child is this?*" as if we are unsure. Like the angels and the shepherds who knelt before a child lying in such mean estate—a manger where ox and ass were feeding—we dare to confess what faith sees: **this, this is Christ the King, who salvation brings**.

And because this child is Emmanuel, *God with us*, Christmas will not let us turn away from the world's pain. This Christ is present in the darkness of the Ukraines and the Gazas, in places of oppression and injustice, in the suffering of the innocent and the forgotten. He is not absent from the world's wounds—he is born right into them.

This, this is Christ the King—bringing light where there is despair, hope where there is devastation, joy where the world insists there can be none. And because God is with us, then God also sends **us** into that darkness to bear his light. (ELW296, What Child Is This?)