

The After-Christmas Letdown

- “We have seen his glory...grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Sis/bro Xp: today we need talk re smthng calld ACL. ACL: feeling of sadnss/disppntmnt that can smtms follow right on heels of joyous celbrtn/Xmas. It can hap: if house full guests, then evone leaves, house empty again, miss; when all presents opened & realize nothing left, all over; if had high expctns for really happy Xmas but ppl arnd you disppntd you, and you feel like whole festivl let you down. That’s: ACL – when you’re so looking frwrd to Xmas, then in blink/eye it comes/goes, and doesn’t really satsfy, and you’re left feeling dissppntd/sad. That’s ACL.
- I bring up this ACL for 2 reasons. 1: Even Xians like us, who know true meaning/Xmas & love celbrng birth/Sav – even we smtms can feel an ACL. Xmas was only 3 days ago, and maybe there are some ppl amng us who sad. Other reason I bring this up: today in Gos we hear re 2 really bad things that hapnd shortly after birth/J that left lot/ppl suffering fr a severe ACL. Hwvr, “**We know that in all things God wrks good those love him, who called acc purp**” (Rom 8:28); that was true back then & true today. And so today, as we hear epilogue/Xmas story, we see what the very 1st ACL looked like.
- **Vs. 13a** – they = Magi; next Sun we celebrate Epiph, coming/Magi; today’s acnt haps right after Magi leave. So, **vs. 13**. Talk re ACL! J now fugitive! Think thru order/events: M&J each living in Naz; only reason made jny Bthlhm, while Mary very pregnnt: census entire Rom wrld that CA decrd. Of course, no room inn, so had give birth in cattle stall. But didn’t stay there; probly after few days, moved into rental house Bthlhm; it’s there that Magi find them, bring gifts. But right after Magi leave, Joe has this dream: **vs. 13b-14** – that very night! So means: anothr long jny, now w/newbrn, travlng by donkey, sleeping at night in tent; baby is fugitive, so have to travel carefully so don’t get cght by Rom soldrs. Probly neither M nor Joe ever been Egypt before; so they’re in diff country, newlyweds, w/baby, running fr law. That’s an ACL! And that’s 1st really bad thing that hapnd right after Xmas.
- Here’s 2nd: **vs. 16**. To try wrap mind arnd this hrrbl seqnc/events, need know little bit re Herod. This: Herod/Grt, who ruling when J was baby. Also had son named Herod, who ruling when J was crucfd; remem how Pilate sent J to that Herod before sentncng him dth. But this Herod, Herod/Grt – the 2 things great at: bldng bldngs & killing ppl. Herod/Grt renovtd/expndd tmpl/Jrslm; built luxurs seaside palace; mnttop fortress, Masada, & many other large bldngs. Also killed lot ppl that he consdrd poltcl rivals, like: bro/law, mo/law, 1/wives, 2/sons, & 46 mems/Sanhdrn. Histry remems Herod/Grt as bldthrst maniac. And so does Bible. When he heard re the birth of a “king/Jews”, he was not about to let some up/coming rival stand a chance.
- So, **vs. 16ab**. I don’t know how many babies that’d be. Bthlhm: small town; so maybe few dzn? But just imagine, for just momnt: Rom soldrs convrg/twn; march dr/dr, brkng dwn drs, hunting for babies. When find one, strip it naked. If she’s girl, she lives. If he’s boy, they drive swrd w/o mercy thru helpless little body. And if any mo/fr/sib stood in way, then their blood’d drip fr soldr’s swrd, as well. It was a dark day in Bthlhm – and only few mos after brightness of hvnly host lit up sky on night of J’s birth. **Vs. 18**.
- What are we to make of this massacre, and how will we commmrnt these dead chldrn? Many centrns ago, Xian Ch decided to commmrnt Masscr Holy Innocents ev yr on 12/28 (today). By calling them holy & innocent, we’re not saying: w/o original sin. Just saying: 1) didn’t deserve this, obvslly; and 2) as Jewish boys, marked w/seal of covnnt thru circmcsn, they: members of God’s family. So when each baby boy lost his life, gained his etrnl life. Smtms I think re these babies when I sing the *Te Deum*: “white-robed army martyrs praise you.” This is 2nd ACL.
- Now, if I were to end sermon right here, you might walk away fr ch today thinking, “Man, today was downer! All we heard re: J the fugitive and town full dead babies.” And that in itself might be engh give you ACL! But there’s smthng else I need you see in this rdng. **Vs. 15b. Vs. 17**. And once made it back home safely to Naz: **vs. 23b**. 3x Mt mentions fulflmnt. Thru all wckdnss/sadnss/dth/disppntmnt, God fulfilld his plan for J. Even though today’s Gos rdng is filled w/ACLs, the imp truth: God did keep J safe, for our sake. Kept him safe: in Egypt, fr massacre; brght him safely to Naz. God fulfilld his plan for J – here & throughout life: as J was baptzd, heald ppl, prchd Gos, crucfd, and raised life to take away sins. God fulfilled his plan: for J & for our salvtn. God’s plans: not always our plans; and we certly don’t

always understand why God does/allows what does. But we do know that Lord always fulfills his plans and sees to it that everything works out for a good purpose. He did that for J; and does that for us,

- Which, I think, is very important for us to realize today, as we consider this sad account. No matter what's going on in your life right now, whether happy/sad, Lord has a plan for you, and he's going to fulfill that plan & make all things work out for your good. Have you or someone you love recently been diagnosed with a major, unexpected health concern? Lord has a good plan for you. Has some catastrophe/hospitalization come into your life? Lord has a good plan for you. Are you experiencing time of great joy/optimism, or time of transition, & your future looks uncertain? Lord has a good plan for you. And that's not just a sentimental Christian platitude; it's a promise/God. **"We know that in all things God works good those who love him, who call according to purpose. For those God foreknew also predestined to be confirmed to image/Son"** (Rom 8:28-29). So God works for our good; has a purpose/plan for our lives; and conforms us, molds/shapes us, through all the difficult life experiences we go through, as we follow J. Lord will fulfill his good plan for you, just like he fulfilled his good plan for J. We just need to trust him!
- So if you, 3 days after Christmas, are in mid/ACL, chances are you're not alone. Lots of people feel sad/disappointed when the excitement/anticipation/Christmas is over/done. M&J certainly did, & so did parents of those baby boys. But don't let this sad account get you down, & don't let ACL get you down either. LJ: still born for you, to live/die/rise for you, to save you, because God loves you. And promises you that has a good plan for you, even when it's hard to see. You can count on J; he'll never let you down! Let that truth be our remedy for an ACL.

Matthew 2:13-23

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

