

HOLY HEROES

Holy Innocents-martyrs

Feast Day: December 28

Herod "the Great" was king of Judea at the time of Christ's birth. He was a master politician and a brutal leader. He was also insecure and afraid of any threat to his throne.

MATTHEW 2:1-18 tells this story: Herod was "greatly troubled" when the wise men from the east came asking where is "the newborn king of the Jews", whose star they had seen. They were told that according to the Jewish Scriptures, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod tried to trick them and told them to report back to him on their way home, for he too wanted to "do him homage." After the wise men found Jesus and offered Him their gifts, they were warned by an angel to avoid Herod on their way home. Jesus escaped to Egypt.

Herod became furious and in a futile attempt to rid himself of the newborn king, he ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem two years or younger. The number of babies killed was perhaps 20 or 25.

The devastation of this event caused St. Matthew to quote the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more."

The feast of the Holy Innocents is kept within the Christmas season because they gave their life for the newborn Savior. They symbolize those ready to die for Christ at any age and in any time: they died instead of Christ and thus for him.

It is appropriate to remember the vast number of children not yet born who have been killed by abortion in our day. But even if there had been only one, we see the human person as God's greatest treasure of creation, as we are made for eternity and graced by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore of infinite value.