



# URBAN CURRENT

## Bloody Bethlehem

Students reported the shooting began in classroom 15 at 10:38 a.m. PDT, Thursday, October 1, 2015, where English and writing classes are conducted. Chris Harper-Mercer, a student in the writing class, entered and fired a shot to the back of the room.

He shot the assistant English professor at point blank range. Allegedly asking two students for their religion, he shot them after they responded. Nineteen people were shot. Ten were killed.

Harper-Mercer is described in a *New York Times* piece as “withdrawn and quiet ... spending most of his time indoors at his mother’s apartment.” His stepsister said, “He always put everyone before himself and wanted everyone else to be happy.”

Madness and murder is loose in the land. The list I am reading includes all shootings of four or more persons per incident across the country from January 1, 2015 to October 6, 2015. It identifies 298 such incidents.

During the 1970s and 80s, with many having fled the “dangerous cities,” I was bending any ear that came close with the dire prediction, “What’s in the city today is everywhere else tomorrow. You can run but you can’t hide.” What more dramatic example of this than the mass murders that have now violated many a serene street and shattered many a quiet town.

One mass shooting after another is met with talking-heads assuring us our laws are inadequate. The discussion soon moves from legal and political to psychological. “These people are sick. Our mental health support system is weak.” Several days later, if the talk show host is low on fodder, there might be discussion about our social fabric.

Legal. Political. Psychological. Social.

Strangely, we never make it from legal to moral, much less to spiritual. Consequently, public discourse never gets close to root causes, nevermind solutions.

What does mass murder have to do with

Bethlehem? Quite a lot to those who know the Bible story.

Bethlehem is not just about a baby in a manger; it’s the drama of two teenage parents becoming intercontinental refugees fleeing a violent killer on a rampage.

Mary and Joseph’s flight is as much part of the Christmas story as is the newborn cradled in his young mother’s arms.

Can we reconcile the westernized Christmas of soft candlelight, gentle snow, gathered family, brightly wrapped presents, zippy gadgets, played out on a stage that holds everything awful and evil at bay with the reality of Jesus’ entrance into the world?

The Christ child was born away from the comforts of home because a foreign power decided to count the taxpayers. This set the stage for a midnight bolt for safety and a bloodbath involving Bethlehem babies.

Herod became king as a result of a battle in which his brother was killed.

Herod perceived that the party of Antigonus represented a possible rivalry. He killed 45 of them. Mariamne, Herod’s wife, had a young brother who served briefly as high priest. The brother’s popularity made Herod nervous so he arranged for the young man’s drowning while swimming one hot day. His wife’s grandfather was 80 years old when Herod had him put to death.

In what can only be described as an ancient soap opera of accusation, infidelity, intrigue, and deceit, Herod had his uncle Joseph killed. He killed three of his own sons for plotting against him.

Sick and dying, he felt there would be rejoicing over his death so he retired to hot springs east of the Dead Sea. He ordered principle Jews held in the arena at Jericho to be killed upon his death so there would be mourning, not for him of course, but over the death of the Jews that would hopefully dull the rejoicing over his own death.

Can anyone say crazy? How do you spell egomaniac?

Herod represented the political power of Rome. Legally, he could send soldiers to Bethlehem on a search-and-destroy mission. Would babies in Bethlehem have been spared with stronger sword control? Psychologically maybe he was a wing nut. He could have been a socially inept loner who lived next door and “seemed like a nice guy.” He just happened to be on the throne.

Sure, you can easily look at a case file like Herod’s and, absent any other theory, diagnose him as mentally ill. What if he was just a sinner, a man of weak character with no moral code and too much power? What if Herod’s primary problem was spiritual not legal, political, psychological, or social?

Herod was depraved. Oh! And we’re different? Look at us walking around like 50 million babies have not been slaughtered legally in the land of the free and home of the brave. Planned Parenthood is still open and funded, by us.

A bloody, grieving Bethlehem reminds us that a real Savior came into a real world. Our world.

Face it. The Christmas you hope to experience this year is a universe away from the reality of Jesus’ earthly arrival.

You want to be home. He left home.

You desire to be surrounded with your own. He came to His own and they didn’t receive Him.

You hope for comfort and tranquility.

Remember. A stable. A midnight escape. A bloody Bethlehem.



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