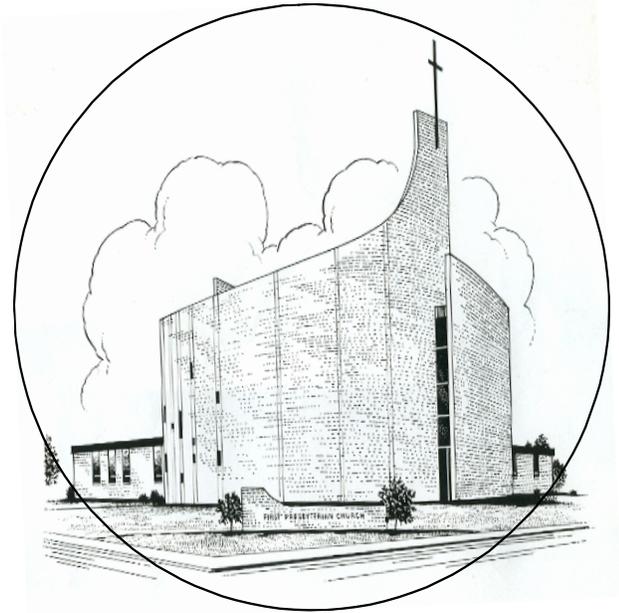


## Goodbye Class of 2018... Hello Class of 2021



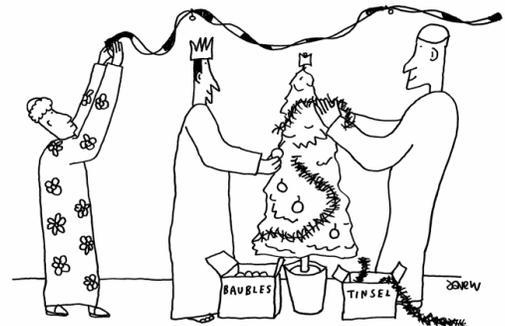
We will install our new Elders during worship on January 13 (Baptism of the Lord). Thank you to our new incoming elders (Class of 2021): Gene Whitfill, Whit Hunt and Sue Lewellen.

Our sincere thanks to our three outgoing who just completed their term (Class of 2018): Brandy Tirey, Mike Craig and Glenna Butler. We appreciate their hard work and dedication to our church. This was an adventurous year especially for Property & Grounds! The church, church shed and manse got new roofs and consequently we had to find a new insurance company!! Both buildings are now insured with Brotherhood Mutual.



## Epiphany Potluck and "Removal of the Greens"

As the wise men brought their offerings to the Christ child bring your edible offerings this Sunday, January 6th to enjoy our first potluck of the new year together. If you can stay a little afterwards to help pack up the Christmas decorations it would be greatly appreciated.



EPIPHANY: THE WISE MEN /  
TAKING DOWN THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

# Dave's Doodles

Usually, the Doodles are light hearted explorations of things I find interesting or funny, or a gentle commentary on current events, or some other non-important sort of thing. Today, however, I feel like I need to talk about one of the most important, yet least addressed aspects of the Nativity story, the 'Massacre of the Innocents', as it is called, the putting to death of all children under two years old in Bethlehem by King Herod (Matthew 2:1-18).

Now, of course, I understand why we don't spend a lot of time preaching this scripture. It's hardly uplifting, and seems like it could have been written by Stephen King rather than being the divinely inspired Word of God.

But it's in the Bible, and there's a reason it's in there, and so I think we need to take just a moment and think about it together.

This incident, which only occurs in Matthew, is the result of Herod discovering from the Wise Men from the East (What were their names again? How many were there? When did they actually show up? Did they bring the most practical gifts for a newborn? Ah, the deep questions of history that can never be answered), that there was a new king born in Bethlehem. Of course, Herod saw this is a threat, and tried to get the Wise Men to tell him where the child was, so that he could, in his words, 'also go and worship him'.

The problem was, Herod was talking to, duh, Wise Men, and they knew better than to tell a tyrant where his successor could be found. And so now, Herod is left with a dilemma. He knows there is someone out there, getting ready to take his place, he knows generally where he is, but he doesn't know exactly where to find him.

And so, he does the only logical thing. He kills all the children under two years of age, just to make sure. You know, the prudent, practical thing to do. The only reasonable solution to the problem.

And you know what? He was right, according to his own way of thinking. The only way to maintain his position was eliminate the threat, and because it was unclear from exactly where the threat was coming, it was simply best to take them all out. It was nothing personal. It was political. It wasn't murder, it was, um, collateral damage.

Of course, Herod has earned a place in history for his decision. While it made perfect sense to him and his political aspirations, from the perspective of a normal human being it is grotesque. Who kills infants on this scale? Who takes out an entire generation, just to be sure? Herod, in his own mind took care of the problem, but at what cost? What cost to the mothers, lamenting their children? What cost to the fathers, considering revolution?

I wonder if it was worth it.

I also wonder if Herod even really thought all that deeply about it.

Did he really consider what he was doing? Did he really think about the emotional destruction he was about to unleash? Or was his decision simply pragmatic, born of political necessity, a small price to pay for the greater good? After all, it was just a couple of dozen kids, who could blame him for being politically expedient?

Now, the reality was, under Herod, the Jews had a certain amount of autonomy. Herod was a puppet of the Roman occupation, but at least he was a Jewish puppet. What would happen if the status quo changed? What if this new king, this baby in Bethlehem, decided to go rogue, and upset the apple cart? The Romans would come in, take over, and any sense of Jewish independence would be lost. So, to Herod's way of thinking, a little genocide was worth it, just to keep things the way they were. In fact, it was for the good of the people, and they would thank him for it, in the future, if they really thought about it.

Well, for two thousand years, people have been really thinking about it, and the verdict is in: Herod is a monster, and he killed babies in order to maintain political power. He thought the end justifies the means. He was wrong.

And this is why this story is important to us. It reminds us of how easy it is for people in power to act in monstrous ways in order to maintain power, all in the name of the people. Throughout history, despots have killed thousands, millions of people for the greater good.

And the awful, terrifying truth is, few, if any, tyrants ever set out to be evil. No-one actually thinks that they, themselves are evil. No-one actually rubs their hands together in evil glee, plotting to do evil things. That's not the way it works. The way it works is that their position is threatened, and apparently the only solution is to remove the threat. Not to negotiate. Not to accommodate. But to annihilate.

But when this is the solution, innocent people die. And history judges the killers of innocent people harshly.

The birth of our savior was, and is, a glorious thing. But it was not welcomed in all quarters, especially not in the halls of power. Many people, especially the poorest of the people, rejoiced, but others were terrified. And because of their fear, they committed one of the most heinous crimes in the Bible.

And, you know, this sort of rationalization was not limited to one man, in one country, at one time two thousand years ago.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the author the 'Gulag Archipelago' spent several years in the Soviet prison system in Siberia. He has written searing books about how the Communists would justify the most horrible atrocities in the name of the good of the people, and one of his most memorable quotes reminds us that:

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Nobody sets out to be evil. Nobody thinks of themselves as being evil, except maybe in a sort of abstract, theological way. But we don't think of ourselves as actively committing evil acts. Our actions are always justified, either by ideology, religion, cultural identity, or by some other sense of doing good, even it means that some others are adversely affected.

But the reality is, when innocents die, history judges harshly. Herod is not recognized as a great

# January Birthdays

Bill Weaks	Jan 2
David Adamson	Jan 6
Dylan Travis	Jan 7
Angie Rushing	Jan 15
Kolt Kersh	Jan 20
Wilburn Lackey	Jan 22
Kelley Bozeman	Jan 31



# Anniversaries

Bill & Tammy Coleman	Jan 1
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# Christmas Offering

As last year we partnered with the Salvation Army again and adopted a single mom with three kids and provided all their Christmas gifts (including two bikes!) and groceries for a holiday dinner and restock mom's pantry.



We collected \$1,135 and spent \$402 on the family. The remaining \$733 is also going to the Salvation Army to help with their programs: eviction prevention, utility assistance, food assistance, clothing, etc.

# January 2019

Sun      Mon      Tue      Wed      Thu      Fri      Sat

		1 	2	3	4 2 pm – Terry McEachern Funeral	5 10 am – Scout Parent Meeting
6 10:30 am – Worship & Communion 11:30 am – Potluck & Removal of Greens	7	8 6:30 pm – Den Meeting	9 11 am – MoW 1:30 pm – Naomi Ruth Circle 6 pm – WNF T-Bones	10	11	12 8 am – Men’s Breakfast 9 – 2 pm – Session Retreat @ Manse
13 9:15 am – Sunday School 10:30 am – Worship/Elder Installation	14	15 6:30 pm – Den Meeting	16 11 am – MoW 6 pm – WNF Amazin’ Grazin’ 6:45 pm – Choir	17	18	19
20 9:15 am – Sunday School 10:30 am – Worship <b>Pick up FISH bag</b>	21	22 6:30 pm – Den Meeting	23 11 am – MoW 6 pm – WNF Disciples 6:45 pm – Choir	24	25	26
27 9:15 am – Sunday School 10:30 am – Worship <b>Return FISH bag</b>	28	29 6:30 pm – Pack Meeting	30 11 am – MoW 6 pm – WNF Groovy Grillers 6:45 pm – Band	31		



A huge Thank You from our family for the Christmas gift! We were able to go into the New Year without medical debt(!!!) and Wiley got some new tires for his truck. Y'all are so generous to us! Thank you so much!!

Dave, Karen and Wiley Hawkins

Also, thank you to all who stopped by our open house on New Year's Eve. It was so much fun and meant a lot to have you all there. The party turned epic when Drew, Rhonda, Dylan and Kaylee showed up!!



king, in fact, he is relegated to the dust heap in the story of Jesus' birth. And whether we want to admit it or not, our own national policies through the years, whether Democratic, Republican, or whatever, have not always been made with the powerless and innocent in mind, yet it is they who have borne the brunt of those policies.

It is not my intent today to remember every bad decision we, as a country have made, but it is unmistakably true that we have done things, as a nation, that range from embarrassing to callous, to heartless, to genocidal. All in the name of the good of the people, of course, and all have had devastating effects on the least among us.

We forget history if we think that the greater good demands the deaths of the innocent. Our foreign and domestic policy, if it is to reflect any sort of Christian, or even human decency, must take into account the fate, not of the powerful, the rich, the influential and the safe, but the effects of that policy on the weak, the hungry, the vulnerable, the homeless and the poor.

Anything less is simply Herodian.

So, what is the Gospel of this text of terror from the Book of Matthew? What is the Good News of this story of power, politics, and genocide? Is there anything good that can be drawn from this horrifying scripture?

My friends, the Good News of this Gospel is this: we do not have to be Herod. Our constituency is not the Romans, the rich, or the influential. As Christians, our constituency is the poor, those on the margins, those with no voice. We are not required to make the sort of decision that kills the innocent, in fact, we are called upon to defend the innocent. We do not represent an ideology, or a political party, we represent those who have no one to represent them. As Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matt. 25:40)

Above all, we are freed from the necessity to cling to power. We are free from the need to maintain control. Our job is not to enforce, to judge, to attack those whom we fear; our job is to protect, advocate, and speak for the voiceless.

We are free from party orthodoxy, from the disapproving stares of neighbors, from twitter attacks, and unflattering posts on Facebook. We are free from the idea that we have to do evil to the few in order to do good for the many.

The Good News of the scripture reminds us that our Savior was born homeless, and that due to political oppression in his own country, his family was forced to migrate to Egypt in order to stay alive. They were illegals before that word ever became cool. The Good News is that our savior knows well the effects of policies based on fear, on hatred, and above all, on the desire to maintain control.

And in his life among us, his death because of us, and his resurrection for us, he demonstrates what real power over all that looks like.

This is who we are. This is who we follow. It may not be popular. It may not be pragmatic. It may not even be smart, according to the rules of this world. But it is right, and we know it. In this new year, I encourage all of us to claim this freedom that we have as Christians to resist the impulse to fear, to exclude, and to hate. Leave that to the politicians. We are called to a better way of life. Let's live it.

## Focus

First Presbyterian Church  
2101 Utica  
Plainview, TX 79072

Phone: (806) 296-2604  
E-mail:  
plv.firstpc@gmail.com



## JANUARY NEWS TO KNOW

### Focus

is published monthly by First Presbyterian Church, Plainview, Texas. Articles for inclusion in the FOCUS are requested by the 20th of the month.

Rev. David Hawkins, Pastor  
Dr. Charles Teykl, Pastor Emeritus  
Karen Hawkins, Publisher

Be sure to note these important dates and jobs to be done during the month of February.

### Ushers

Whit Hunt, Richard Morgan,  
Gaylan Goddard, Chris Lewellen,  
Larry Williams, Mike Craig, Dean  
Thompson, Graham Tirey

### Wednesday Night Fellowship

1/9—T-Bones  
1/16—Amazin' Grazin'  
1/23—Disciples  
1/30—Groovy Grillers

### December Attendance

Dec 2	42
Dec 9	34
Dec 16	39
Dec 23	47
Dec 24	87
Dec 30	22

### December Contributions

Dec 2	\$7,794.15
Dec 3 (online)	\$2,300.00
Dec 9	\$2,297.00
Dec 16	\$2,526.50
Dec 23	\$9,040.02
	(of that \$7,000 pre-paid pledge)
Dec 30	\$3,940.00

Total Income:	\$20,897.67
Total Expenses:	<u>\$14,690.44</u>
	\$ 6,207.23

