

Sunday, January 4, 2026 Epiphany Sunday Worship Sermon
"Two Kings" Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Jeremiah 31:10-17, Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

① [A New Exodus]

Happy New Year. May the Lord protect your steps this year and grant you a fruitful year in faith.

Today's message is titled "Two Kings." These two kings are Jesus, the King of Heaven, and Herod, the king of earth. Immediately after Jesus was born, King Herod sought to kill Him. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." " (Matthew 2:13) So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and fled to Egypt. Matthew writes that this happened "to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet" (verse 15). This prophecy is found in the Old Testament, Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Among Jewish teachers, it was believed the Messiah would follow a fate similar to Moses. Herod's order to kill all male children under two years old also resembled Pharaoh of Egypt's command: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, that none of them may live" (Exodus 1:22). The angel's words to Joseph in Egypt, "Those who sought the child's life are dead" (Matthew 2:20), also closely resemble the Lord's words to Moses in Midian: "Now return to Egypt, and all who sought your life are dead" (Exodus 4:19). Since the Gospel of Matthew was written for Jews, it overlays the life of Moses with that of Jesus. Moses prophesied to the Israelites, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me" (Deuteronomy 18:15), and Matthew declares that this prophet is Jesus.

Therefore, this story represents Jesus' "new Exodus." The idea that the sin of Adam's disobedience was removed through the obedience of Jesus, the new Adam, appears frequently in the writings of the second-century Church Father Irenaeus. "When the Lord reunited all things, He also took upon Himself the battle against our enemies and reunited it within Himself." By repeating Israel's history in this way, the disobedience of the old Israel is restored. Jesus is the new leader guiding humanity, and Joseph and Mary, journeying with Him, are the new Israel. The Bible repeatedly speaks of the Exodus from Egypt and the Exile from Babylon to teach that the life of faith is a "journey out of this world" toward the Promised Land (the Kingdom of God) with Jesus. Therefore, we must set the "Kingdom of God" more clearly as our goal than last year and resolve to abandon this world. This is what the disciples have always proclaimed: "Those who have ties to this world should live as though they had none, for the present form of this world is passing away." (1 Corinthians 7:31) "Through this cross, the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)

② **【Arise and Keep Your Faith】**

The story of Herod's persecution teaches us that demonic forces are at work trying to kill the faith that has begun to sprout. Herod still works against you today. He tries to stop you from going to church, from reading the Bible, from praying. If you let him, your faith will die. But this story also tells us that there were people who desperately tried to protect Jesus—that is, their faith. They were Joseph and Mary, His mother. How did Joseph protect Jesus? The word “arise” appears four times here. “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt” (verse 13), “Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and departed for Egypt” (verse 14), “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel” (verse 20), “Then Joseph got up... and returned to the land of Israel” (verse 21). Joseph shows no hesitation regarding the message in the dream. He acts immediately upon hearing it. “Getting up” symbolizes faith and resurrection, while “sleeping” symbolizes death, laziness, and despair. To keep faith, we must continually listen to God's word. Let us strive to read the Bible diligently this year as well.

③ **【God rules over all the earth, even evil He rules and uses】**

God the Father did not immediately intervene to destroy Herod when His only Son, Jesus, was persecuted. Jesus was fleeing for His life, facing imminent death. Why does God not swiftly destroy evil?

The Book of Jeremiah contains these words: "I have made the earth, I have created mankind and animals, and I give it to anyone I deem worthy. I have given all these nations into the hands of my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and even the wild animals are subject to him. ... But when the time comes for his kingdom to end, ... he himself will be enslaved. (Jeremiah 27:6-7) God called the Babylonian king who destroyed Israel “my servant.” The Babylonian king was also an instrument of God, under God's control, permitted by God to bring trials. Likewise, the wicked kings of this world are under God's control and are merely His servants. When their roles end, they will be judged for the evil they themselves have done.

●Pastor Yasuro Enomoto says this: "If we do not believe that evil people are created by God, we fear evil. But no matter how much it torments us, hurts us, or how powerful it may be against us, if it is created by God, we can be at peace. For God's sovereignty extends even there. “Tillich wrote, ‘God created cancer too.’...” “...Human history is like a stage for a play... They are moving according to the script.... We must consider who wrote this script of history and who is directing it.” “...How can we give strength to those who have lost their will? We ourselves must at least be free from such fear....”

If God were to destroy all evil, He would have to destroy all people, for evil exists

within you too. Therefore, God forgives the existence of evil and uses it to bring forth good. In this way, He strengthens our faith.

Look closely at the Scriptures. “He remained there until Herod died” (15), “When Herod died” (19), “Those who sought the child’s life perished” (20)—it repeatedly states “died, died, died.” Herod must die. Evil that opposes God must perish. “For the enemy will never prevail against you; he who hates you will be put to shame” (Psalm 92:10). Through these stories, God teaches us: Leave evil alone, for it will destroy itself. No matter how powerful evil may seem, there is no need to fear. What God did not create—evil, death—will surely perish. Only what comes from God will endure to the end. Thirty-three years later, people killed Christ on the cross, placed Him in a tomb, and sealed it. Yet on the third day, He rose again. All their efforts were in vain. No one can overcome Him. You possess His immortal life. The enemy can do nothing to me. Therefore, do not be afraid.

● There is a French film called *The Christmas Tree*. One day, Marcel, the son, suffers an accident and is exposed to radiation. The doctor declares he has only six months to live. His father, Laurent, quits all his jobs, retreats to the countryside Marcel loves, and they resolve to live each day to the fullest together. It was Christmas Eve. When the father returned from shopping, he found Marcel had passed away beneath the decorated Christmas tree. Beside him was a note reading, “Thank you, Dad. Be happy!” Father Laurent recalled the memory: “I was devastated. Marcel had only six months left, and medicine could do nothing. I prayed to God for a miracle, but no miracle came. No, a miracle did happen. I thought that tearing off each page of the calendar, experiencing that daily renewal of drawing closer to death step by step, would be pure hell. But it wasn’t. For Marcel and me, there was no life more wonderfully full than those six months. Every night, both of us slept incredibly peacefully, filled with gratitude. What else could this be but a miracle?”

I believe that days filled with love are the ones where we truly live radiantly. Rather than striving to eliminate “evil” from this world, it is about cultivating faith that absolutely trusts in the life and love of Christ who dwells within us. It is knowing that even if evil exists, it is okay—for God’s life and God’s love are stronger. May the love and life of Christ fill you.