



Prepare Ye The Way



How often do we open ourselves up to change? Especially at Christmas, when we are warmed by tradition and the familiar, and find comfort in people and homes we know well, we don't always welcome things that will disrupt us from our norm.

Over the next four weeks of advent, as once again we prepare the way for Jesus' arrival, we will reflect on how we might be disrupted from our norm by seeking out **transformational encounter**.



In the Magnificat we read,
"He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble".

Do we recognise our own pride and might
which needs to be undone?

Do we see the hunger of those who hope to be filled?
How can we join in the work of God and cause holy disruption?

Join us on this journey to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival through transformational encounter. Look out for more stories and reflections, by following us on social media:

Twitter: @publicissues

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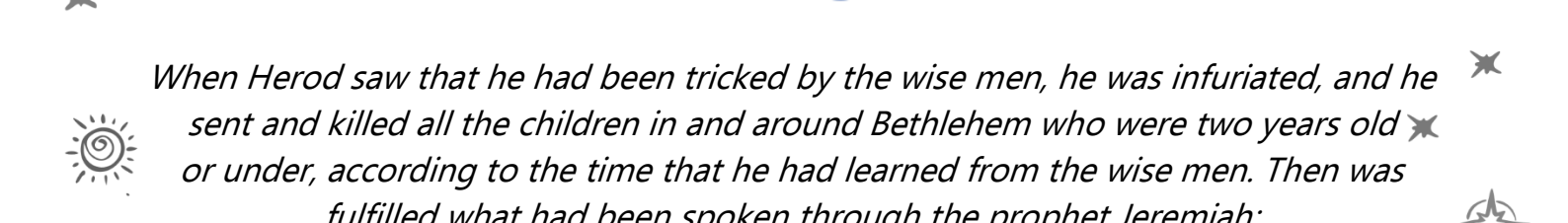
Keep in touch, and let us know about the effect of your transformational encounters using **#prepareyetheway**.



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Week 3: A New Order



When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through 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 are no more."*



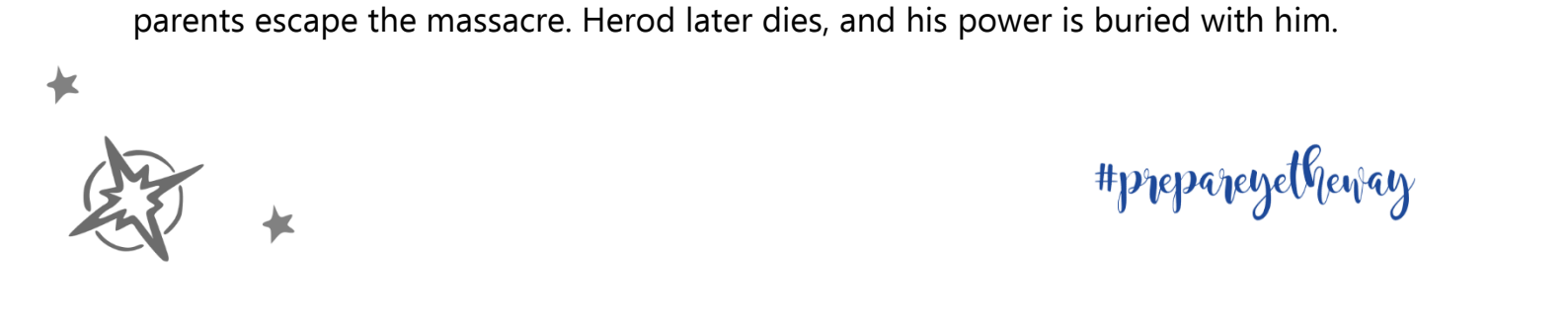
Matthew 2: 16-18

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem. The wise men followed a star. Even in an era before breaking news alerts, the birth of Jesus was a major event.

Sometimes we forget, however, that the arrival of this great hope of humanity was not universally celebrated. Luke's Gospel tells us that King Herod was "disturbed" by the news. Indeed, the consequences of his rage are profoundly disturbing. Consumed by insecurity, jealous to protect his own power, the king orders the killing of every single male infant in Bethlehem.

The Christmas story proclaims new birth, but here we find ourselves confronted with the pain of loss. We see the vengefulness of a ruler who uses his authority for evil purposes. We hear the 'weeping and great mourning' of those whose children are no more. We feel the injustice of power abused, as the powerless are slaughtered by the powerful.

This, mercifully, is not the end of the story. With divine protection, Jesus and his parents escape the massacre. Herod later dies, and his power is buried with him.



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How was it that Jesus, this vulnerable baby born into the humblest of beginnings, could cause such disruption? How could someone seemingly so powerless threaten someone so powerful?

As Christians, we embrace a counter-cultural understanding of how to strive for peace. We live in a world where, all too often, our preference is for leaders who project strength. At the beginning of the year, the President of the United States launched a Twitter tirade against the leader of North Korea, boasting: "I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is much bigger & more powerful than his, and my Button works."

Such declarations of physical strength go against everything Jesus teaches about power. Born in the humblest of circumstances, he comes to establish a new order, representing a profound challenge to the powerful.

In his own exercise of power, Jesus shows us a different, better way. Instead of inciting the anger of an oppressed people living under Roman rule, Jesus preached a message of peace and reconciliation. Instead of spending time with the movers and shakers of society, he welcomed tax collectors and sinners. Instead of denouncing those who conspired against him, Jesus was full of compassion as he looked down on them from the cross. He urged: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

Peace in the face of provocation would strike many as timid submission. Indeed, in his birth and death, Jesus became greatly vulnerable. But in his resurrection he has overcome the world. We can rejoice that true power is found by walking the way of Christ, as he reconciled sinful humans to the holy God. Our calling is not simply to marvel at Jesus's actions, but to emulate his pursuit of peace, to carry with us his spirit of reconciliation.

This is a difficult endeavour because peace threatens the most powerful. King Herod simply could not countenance the challenge posed to his rule by a baby born in a stable.



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Have we begun to understand the power of Christ's triumph through peace? Have we understood that his approach does not represent timid submission, but rather the outworking of a new order? In the coming kingdom, power is not the preserve of the strong, influential or wealthy. Rather, true power is vested in the one who shows us what it means to be humble, whose vulnerability and message of peace and reconciliation shatters our preconceptions and challenges the most powerful.

Questions:

When was the last time you used power or influence to get your own way? Did it work? Did anyone pay the price for your power?

Can you think of a time when you have seen the powerless confront the powerful and win? What difference did this make to your understanding of power?

Where might an attitude of peace and forgiveness help us to solve a current conflict, either in your own life or in the world?

Challenge:

Reflect on a time when you have seen a different kind of power in action, working for peace and based on reconciliation.

How could you use your influence to promote an attitude of peace?

Prayer:

God of reconciliation,
In peace and humility, you challenge the powerful who promote injustice.
Thank you that you cast divine protection over those who work for peace.
We pray for courage in the face of violent and controlling power,
that we might stand steadfast in trust of another way.
Help us to resist using power to exploit others. Instead, help us to lift up
reconciliation and forgiveness, as we work towards your kingdom.
Amen.

You can find more of our work on peacemaking at
www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/peacemaking.

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