

A most haunting Christmas carol

In 16th Century Coventry, England a series of pageants centered around the birth of Christ were presented by the various trade guilds. Near the end of the Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors (Tailors), the most haunting of all Christmas carols is sung.

The wise men have visited Jesus and given him gifts. Herod, on learning he was deceived by them, went into a rage and ordered all male infants in Bethlehem to be killed. Mary and Joseph, having been warned by an angel, decide to leave for Egypt. Before they exit, three young women carrying their infant sons enter. As Mary and Joseph leave with Jesus, they sing a Christmas Hymn that mourns the loss of the innocents, murdered by a jealous, raging king.

Lully lullay, thou little tiny child,  
By, lully lullay, thou little tiny child,



DR. SEAN NIESTRATH

By, lully, lullay.  
O sisters two, how may we do  
For to preserve this day  
This poor youngling for  
whom we do sing  
By, lully lullay?  
Herod the King in his  
raging  
Chargèd he hath this  
day  
His men of might in  
his own sight  
All young children to  
slay.  
That woe is me, poor  
child, for thee,  
And ever mourn and may  
For thy parting neither say nor  
sing  
By, lully lullay  
(ed. Ben Byram-Wigfield, 2024)

Each of the three mothers then present their futile defenses. One offers herself in place of her child. One condemns the soldiers as deceivers. One threatens to hit them over the head with a pan. The soldiers, after murdering the infants, lament the vengeance that they know is coming because of their terrible

deed — on them and on Herod. The Pageant is based on the birth narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, with a prologue from the prophet Isaiah. It clearly reflects the Middle Ages, in which it was performed and eventually written down around 1534. It does, however, remind us that the stories we read in the Gospels involved real people. The arrival of the savior of the world was met immediately with jealousy and violence. It is an uncomfortable episode in the early life of Jesus. The Coventry Carol, as the hymn is known today, is a powerful representation of the quote from Jeremiah 31:15 in Matthew 2:18, “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.” Ramah was a gathering place for those being carried away to Babylon, most of whom would never return. It was where the prophet Jeremiah was released from his bonds (Jer. 40:1). The depth of this quote in Matthew is worth some thought. In Jeremiah 31, the verse stands nearly alone in the middle of a chapter full of hope and rescue. The prophet tells them in the next verse that the mourning is temporary and that the day is coming when the people will return, and there will be a new covenant. It is in 31:33 that we read, “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” In the Old Testament the people were taken to Babylon because they had failed to stay faithful to God. The prophets warned them repeatedly — both Israel and Judah. The weeping of those taken away, while horrible, could be understood. In Matthew, we are faced with a different dilemma. If we understand the word

“martyr” to be “witness”, then the very first martyrs in the New Testament are those unnamed innocents who were killed because an ungodly king could not countenance a righteous threat to his power. It is a brutal reminder that the first response of the powers that be to the “Prince of Peace” was unmitigated cruelty and violence. The Prince of Peace would eventually be killed by those powers, but not before he unleashed teaching that would change the world. He would also demonstrate that even death could not defeat the purpose of God. I wonder if some of those women in Bethlehem were in Jerusalem when the one whose arrival led to the death of their children saw the death of yet another innocent. I wonder if any of them were there watching Mary, or maybe even talking with her. The “men of might” may have taken innocent lives, but we celebrate the one who gives it.

Shining a light on Hanukkah celebrations

BY METRO CREATIVE  
Fall and winter provide plenty of opportunities for merriment, including Hanukkah, which encourages the Jewish community to gather and celebrate their faith together. This year, the holiday begins on Sunday, Dec. 14, at sundown and lasts until sundown on Monday, Dec. 22.

WHAT IS HANUKKAH?  
Hanukkah (also spelled Chanukah) is a Jewish festival that lasts eight days. It starts on the 25th day of Kislev, which usually falls within the month of December, and commemorates the rededication of

the Second Temple in Jerusalem 165 B.C. by the Maccabees. The temple had been previously desecrated by the Syrians. WHY IS HANUKKAH EIGHT DAYS?  
After the Maccabees fended off the Syrian-Greeks and reclaimed their Temple, they sought to light the Temple’s menorah. However, they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination, according to Chabad.org. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of



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The menorah is the centerpiece of the Hanukkah celebration. It holds nine flames, one of which is called the “shamash” (attendant). That candle is used to kindle the other eight lights. By the eighth night of Hanukkah, all eight lights are lit and glowing. ritual purity. Sages subsequently instituted the festival of Hanukkah to commemorate and publicize this miracle. MENORAH LIGHTING  
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of which is called the “shamash” (attendant). That candle is used to kindle the other eight lights. By the eighth night of Hanukkah, all eight lights are lit and glowing. The menorah is placed in a doorway or window. OILY FOODS  
Since the Hanukkah miracle focuses on oil, it is customary to enjoy foods fried in oil. Potato latkes are commonly enjoyed, as are jelly-filled doughnuts called sufganiyah. GIVING  
Hanukkah really isn’t about exchanging gifts. The tradition actually is to give out Hanukkah gelt, which is gifts of money to children.

Also, individuals reward positive behavior and devotion to Torah study. The cash gifts enable kids to give to charity. A MINOR HOLIDAY  
Although it is a significant and widely observed festival, Hanukkah is a historical rather than biblical holiday. It doesn’t carry the same religious weight as other Jewish high holidays like Yom Kippur, for example. Its emphasis may be due in part to Hanukkah’s proximity to Christmas. Hanukkah celebrations enable faithful Jews to celebrate together and focus on their faith during a festive time of year.

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0700 REAL ESTATE FOR SALE

Plaza Storage, 1102 Paris Rd, Ste 1A, Mayfield, KY 42066 will conduct a public auction on Tuesday, Dec. 16 at 4 p.m. Personal property stored in Unit #307 will be sold on-site to satisfy the owner's lien. Items include mattress, fishing rods and more.

0900 LEGALS

The Paducah McCracken Joint Sewer Agency's most recent audit, adopted budget, and most recent financial statement can be viewed at our office located at 621 Northview Street, Paducah, KY 42001, during our normal business hours of 7:30 – 4:00 Monday through Friday.



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