How do we understand the awful violence of the gospel story of the Massacre of the Innocents (Matthew 2: 16-18)? Why did plays, paintings, and stories depicting the slaughter of Bethlehem’s babies by King Herod’s soldiers multiply across Europe in the fifteenth century, often conveyed with an extraordinary brutality that still takes our breath away? Some saw the deaths of these children as a betrayal by rulers, governments, fathers, and even by God. We’ll explore how their anger and anxiety shifted from medieval into the early modern period and how it continues to resonate today.

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