



CHRISTMAS

The Holy Innocents

First Century

Feast—December 28



The Holy Innocents are the young male children from Bethlehem and its vicinity at the time of the birth of Jesus who were put to death by King Herod the Great. Herod ordered their death after the Magi who came from the East to pay homage to the child Jesus left without giving Herod news about “the newborn king of the Jews.” This slaughter is recounted in the second chapter of Matthew’s Gospel but is not mentioned in other sources, such as the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Estimates of the number of infants killed range from 10-12, based on the likely population of Bethlehem at the time of Christ’s birth, to 64,000, a fantastic figure cited in the Syrian liturgy. This feast has been celebrated in the West since the fifth century. The Holy Innocents are the patrons of children, babies, and foundlings.



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