

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

Matt. 2.13-21

According to the birth narrative in Matthew, Jesus, Mary and Joseph fled Bethlehem. Warned in a dream, the wise men also fled before Herod's wrath. The gospel says that Herod was determined to stamp out this rumored threat to his power, so he set out to kill the children who might be the new born king. Of course, we remember that the author of Matthew is telling the story of Jesus to remind us of Moses. Pharaoh attempts to kill off the children of the Hebrews to keep their population down so he can continue to enslave them. Moses, chosen of God, is rescued from Pharaoh's evil schemes and eventually leads the people of Israel out of bondage and into the Promised Land.

Jesus the new Moses is rescued from Herod's evil by God's directing Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt. Run from your Lives. Become homeless refugees. It is your only hope.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear an ethical imperative to care for and protect the sojourners among you, because you O Israel need to remember that you were once sojourners in Egypt. So too for us who follow the Christ—we are called to deep compassion for the sojourners, the refugees among us, because we identify through Christ with all those who have had to flee for their lives.

In the current debates over immigration policy and actuality, we sometimes hear a tone for heartlessness. That tone says who really cares about these people or maybe they are ruining the country or they are just a bunch of lazy, no good, drug dealers. Send em all back, to wherever.

We can hear that kind of scornful attitude in the actions of Herod and further back of Pharaoh. We know that God in Christ calls us to compassion in general and by this story of Jesus as refugee calls us to compassion for refugees in particular.

So within that context we hear and reflect and take supportive action in relation to Vecky Goliath. We care for him in the name of Jesus Christ and we understand the Herod like dangers that he faces in his country of origin.

But even as we root compassion in the soil of our hearts, we look out over a garden that is a jumbled chaos of policies and priorities and practicalities. There are no easy answers—there are only difficulty and painful choices. We face urgency, but without clarity. Come Lord Jesus—help us here to sort some of this out.

So that leads us to the Immigration Quiz. Let's take this quiz and then we will put the results in the newsletter. No one will grade you—remember it is Christmastime. But hopefully we can think together about these perplexing issues.

A number of years ago, I was alone in the church on a late Friday afternoon. The weather had turned bitter cold and a storm had created maybe 3 inches of snow. The buzzer rang. Two women, a mother and daughter stood before me, shivering. They wore light cotton dresses and had only thin jackets. The younger woman was about 20 and 7 or 8 months pregnant. They were Guatemalan and had entered

the US illegally and taken buses that brought them to the Plainfield area. Do you have relatives here? No. Can you speak any English? No. Do you have any job skills for factory work? No

Why did you come here? We came so that the baby to be born would be a US citizen and have some hope of a better life.

I have a friend whose name is Ariane Tombet. She is Swiss and worked for the International Red Cross—her work brought her into the center of many of the worst, humanitarian crisis in the world's recent history. Ruanda, Myanmar, Kosovo, Bosnia, Central America. She emailed me and the church from Gorazde, a city under siege by the Serbs. Gorazde was about 100 miles east of Sarajevo. She had befriended 3 teens, who had different artistic talents and were struggling to learn despite the daily bombardment and sniper fire. Our church eventually sponsored one of those teens Bojana Blagojevic. Bojana's 12 year old niece had been murdered by sniper fire. She wrote this poem reflecting on all those whose lives had been destroyed by the war and ethnic violence.

FOR LITTLE SOULS

Oh, little souls...just born..Just died..

Who could be so cruel to steal your smile?

Oh, little souls...little hearts...

Who was so cruel to steal your dreams?

People are strange, they give the children

Darkness instead of playing and joy...

Who was so cruel to destroy?

All that you had in your chests?

Oh, little souls, I hope

That you will be born, again, in the space...

Maybe like small beautiful birds...

That sky and stars will give you the kiss

Instead of mothers...

Maybe, you will exist again

Like small beautiful flowers...

Oh no, it's so hard to stand

Oh no, it's so hard to know

That you are here no more,

That you are here no more.

We sponsored her on a wing and a prayer. We had enough money to get her into the country and a retired English teacher provided room and board, but we had to scrounge to find the money for community college. Straight A's there and her ability to speak and write in 4 languages won her scholarships to Douglas College and then to Rutgers for her Ph.D. Of course, not all immigrant stories start from such desperation and end in such success. But clearly for those of us who sing the songs of Christmas, who warm ourselves with the faith that Christ has come to dwell among us full of grace and truth, we are called to be beacons of light in the face of the despair that some folks experience as their daily lot, their daily bread.

Jesus, the homeless refugee, loves us and all his people and calls upon us all to make room for him in our hearts—but also in our homes and communities.