

“Christmas Flight” - Rev. Cheryl Wood
December 28-January 2

In our worship services Sunday, we looked at the story in Matthew 2 about the wise men. They were not Jews, but Gentile priests from east of Palestine. They studied the stars and recognized that a new star was in the sky, a signal to them that an important person had been born. They came to Jerusalem to search for “the king of the Jews.” Their inquiries upset King Herod, whom the Romans had installed as “King of the Jews.” Herod was ruthless in eliminating any threats to his power. Consequently, he schemed to use the wise men as spies who would locate this new infant king. Then Herod could dispose of the child. The wise men followed the star to the house in Bethlehem where Jesus and his mother Mary were. They worshiped him and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The wise men or Magi (from the Greek root meaning “magic”) were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. An angel appeared in a dream to Joseph, Mary’s husband, telling him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod. They left in the night and fled to Egypt to save the life of the Christ child.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees. It can be startling to think of that cuddly baby of Bethlehem as a homeless child in danger from the governing authorities. We prefer to stop the story with the visit of the wise men. Yet in acknowledging that Jesus was a refugee, we can be led to see our neighbors who are refugees in a new light. We can be led to work with them for a better life. We can open our eyes to those refugees among us who have not come from far- away lands, but who have suddenly been thrust into a strange and difficult situation through natural disaster, recession, illness, or violence. This week, let us consider our role in responding to the refugees among us.

Monday

Refugees know what it is like to be far from home. When have you been far from home? The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah predicted a terrible day of judgment on the city of Jerusalem (Zion) because the people had disobeyed the Lord. The people would be scattered, but that is not the end of the story. Listen to the comforting words of the Lord, “I will bring you home.”

READ Zephaniah 3:14-20. Prayer: *Loving God, I pray for all of those who are far from home. Comfort them with your presence. In Jesus’ name I pray, AMEN.*

Tuesday

The prophet Jeremiah also spoke of the time when those who have been exiled will return home. Who is included in the return? What does this say to you about God’s concern for the weak? What images of hope, joy, and peace do you find in this reading?

READ Jeremiah 31:7-14. Prayer: *Compassionate God, Thank you for including the weak in your promises. Remind me that hope, joy, and peace are mine to receive and mine to share. In Jesus’ name I pray, AMEN.*

Wednesday

This passage from Isaiah was made famous by George Frederick Handel in his great choral work *Messiah*. Listen to a recording of “The people that walked in darkness” and “For unto Us a Child Is Born.” (If you have access to the internet, try googling on these titles for a YouTube performance.) What hope for refugees do you find in these texts? How has this reading been fulfilled in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? What still remains to be fulfilled?

READ Isaiah 9:2-7. Prayer: *Mighty God, Thank you for your promise of peace. Show me my responsibility in making it a reality. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.*

Thursday

Jesus was a refugee. He was a stranger in Egypt. We don't know who welcomed him. We do know from this text that we can welcome him today through our actions toward others. What will you change about your life in 2010 to respond to this text?

READ Matthew 25:31-40. Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Open my eyes to see you in the people I meet today. Open my ears to hear their calls for help. Open my heart to welcome them even as you have welcomed me. In your holy name I pray, AMEN.*

Friday

The difficulties that refugees face can seem overwhelming. We may want to help, but we feel so limited. Sometime it is difficult to sort through the many voices we hear. It is helpful to remember some simple biblical principles. God calls us to do our part; the rest we can leave in God's hands.

READ Micah 6:8 and Matt. 22:34-39. Prayer: *Dear Lord, I want to be your follower today. Help me to show love to others in my words and actions. In your name I pray, AMEN.*

Saturday

The passage you will be reading today is the one we will deal with in worship tomorrow. Spend some time thinking about it today and preparing your heart for worship.

READ Matthew 7:12. Prayer: *Dear God, As I read this passage today, help me to do so with an open heart, sincerely listening for your voice in my life. Use this passage to prepare me for worship tomorrow. As I read it, help me to set aside my own agenda and my own desires so that I may come to worship tomorrow prepared to be molded by you as I continue my journey to becoming a deeply committed disciple of yours. In Christ's name I pray, AMEN.*

For reflection:

Love Me, Love My Friends!

By Peter Storey

Some tell us that following Jesus is a simple matter of inviting him into our hearts. But when we do that, Jesus always asks, “May I bring my friends?” And when we look at them, we see that they are not the kind of company we like to keep. The friends of Jesus are the outcasts, the marginalized, the poor, the homeless, the rejected—the lepers of life.

We hesitate and ask, “Jesus, must we really have them too?”

Jesus replies, “Love me, love my friends!”

From *Listening at Golgotha: Jesus' Words from the Cross*, by Peter Storey. Copyright 2004 by the author. Published by Upper Room Books. Used by permission.

“Refugees” was the theme of the November/December 2009 issue of *Alive Now* published by The Upper Room, Nashville, Tennessee. Many of the scriptures and ideas for the sermon and for this study guide were suggested by that issue. Pulaski FUMC member Dr. Eli Fisher is Managing Editor of *Alive Now*.