

Jesus was a Refugee

Our traditional, contemplative or celebratory remembrance of Christ's birth here on earth tends to make us forget the harsh realities of those times and places. Strange visions and prophecies, both wonder-full and awe-full. Giving birth in a drafty and smelly barn, away from home and without a supportive family. Visited by a bunch of animal herders with their tale of heavenly hosts shouting and singing of the glory of God. And then the arrival of foreigners with their entourage of servants and animals. Wise and knowledgeable and rich, yes, but what strange gifts they brought: gold for a king, frankincense a sign of priesthood, and myrrh to anoint the dead. No sooner had these visitors left when Joseph was warned to flee by night and day through the desert to Egypt, escaping the slaughter of King Herod's army. There was no time for Mary to rest, no calm, peaceful early childhood days for Jesus.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus and his family - Mary and Joseph - managed to get to Egypt and settle there for a time until King Herod's death? Some legends suggest that the gifts from the Eastern visitors helped buy the needed provisions for the long journey. Were they welcomed in Egypt and helped to find shelter and food? Could Joseph freely take up his trade as a carpenter, worship his God in the synagogue? Or were they looked upon with suspicion, marginalized as different and "other"?

Today there are more than 42 million refugees and displaced persons around the world, 80% of which are women and children. To celebrate 50 years of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, Canadian Anglicans were asked to sponsor 50 refugee families and welcome them into their midst. So far 40 families have been sponsored, some by a single parish, others by an ecumenical group of parishes. "We are so privileged to have this opportunity", said someone from St James Church Dundas which, together with Christ Church Flamborough, sponsored a Palestinian family from Iraq.

At a recent regional meeting of PWRDF I saw photos of 13 families who had been welcomed into parishes in the Diocese of Huron - and three more are on the waiting list!. Comments from each sponsoring parish testified that the blessings were by no means one-sided. Parishioners' minds were stretched with new awareness and understanding; hearts were enlarged with deeper love and gratitude, and people's pocket books - well, they were lighter, but their owners were certainly not poorer.

As we begin a new church year, will we make room for a refugee? Why not consider the possibility to join with a nearby Anglican parish or other denominations in your location. You may not be able to sponsor a refugee family at this time, but through your gift to PWRDF you help maintain the refugee network and advocate for fair and just refugee laws, policies and processes. Remember, Jesus was a refugee.

Doris M'Timkulu on behalf of the St. John's PWRDF Group