

## **Finding Light in the Dark Side of Christmas**

Reading – Matthew 2 v13-23

It's the most wonderful time of the year, sings Andy Williams about the Christmas season and for many people it is. But for us as Christians, we know that there is another side to the story, and Christmas is not complete unless we take a few moments to ponder the dark story of the story – the story that Matthew tells, the massacre of the innocents, and as we hear this story, we can identify with the Holy Family as refugees.

I don't want to ruin your day but this story shatters our cosy illusions of the nativity scene, and sends a cold shiver up our spine.

Just as Mary and Joseph begin to settle down to family life, they are told by wisemen that their names are at the top of Herod's wanted list.

This story reminds us of the harshness and the challenges that people face in life. The challenges that families can face, that can turn their lives around in an instant, illness, unemployment.

It tells us how things can change in a blink of an eye or through the whim of a dictator like Herod or Putin.

We have seen that this year in Ukraine.

We don't have to travel far, just cross the Clyde, take a trip to Braehead and there you see a luxury cruise ship with 1200 refugees on board.

Ordinary people who had been like us last year, celebrating Christmas at home with their loved ones, now crammed onto a cruise ship. Yes, a cruise ship is fine for a week or two, sailing the oceans, but not docked at a pier indefinitely.

Our gospel reading today makes us think about all refugees and migrants.

Our thoughts and prayers are with them and of course must be with the Ukrainian people, as they suffer the misery and hardship that has been directed towards them through a modern day Herod, one who has lost grip on reality, and who does not care who is on his hit list, and who gets murdered, as long as his authority and power is intact.

Jesus' family are now cast onto Herod's hit list and they have nowhere to call home, as they make their way to Egypt, to live in a foreign land, without knowledge of the language and custom. How would they survive? What dangers await them? What kind people will give them shelter?

So, as they faced looking for shelter in Bethlehem, a year later they are again looking for shelter.

This story informs us that Jesus Christ at His most vulnerable, stands in firm solidarity with the millions of displaced people throughout our world today. People who have been displaced by the twin and related injustices of climate crisis and war, over and above any purely natural tragedies.

The world as we have known is changing and at a rapid speed.

Climate change is of course rightly high on the agenda, now spoken of openly by scientists, media, and even royalty, all adding their voices to the apocalyptic dangers that our world faces.

The Secretary General of the United Nations described it last June as a 'suicidal war against nature'. The result is that refugees are created – and will be created – by the continued and expanded new exploitation of oil and gas throughout the world.

This **will** kill and evict sisters and brothers in Christ.

Yes, there is a dark side to Christmas, and God wants us to recognise this, because this is why God came into this world, to face up to, and to change, the dark course of our human history by shining His light into the darkest areas of our world.

In the darkest of times, God appears in visions and dreams to Joseph and the Wise Men, and so they are delivered from Herod's grip, but at the start of Jesus' life, we can see a head-on collision between good and evil, between light and darkness, and so Jesus escapes with his family to Egypt, where he shelters as a refugee, and stays there until God gives them word to move back.

What saves the Holy Family? No more than an angel in a dream: salvation hangs by the slenderest of threads.

Here is our hope in the midst of the chaos of this world: God, is still with us. He still speaks to those who are prepared to listen. Joseph was a humble

man who was in touch with God, or rather God was in touch with him. He was a man who listened intently for the voice of God.

<sup>3</sup>When the wise men had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Joseph is obedient like his forefather Abraham, who responded to God's word also and left home, obedient to God's will.

In Joseph, we see a man who holds onto hope in the midst of fear.

So, as we begin this new year, we are reminded through the holy family, that God enters the darkest of situations, that God comes to us in the midst of our fears, and he whispers His word of encouragement into our hearts.

What are your fears this morning? What challenges are you facing?

We should be thankful, that we are not sitting on a cruise ship berthed at Govan, but that we are living in freedom, but life presents its own challenges to us also.

So, let us be inspired by Joseph to listen for God's word.

So, Joseph leaves and stays in Egypt with his family, perhaps for 5 years, until he again hears another message from God telling him to go back home, Herod was dead.

On this first day of a New Year, may I encourage us all this morning to focus not on our own situations but to focus on God whose eternal nature stands in contrast to our own transience.

The Bible reminds us that we are like the grass, here today and gone tomorrow but God's word endures forever.

Recognise that each day is God's gift to us, and so as we journey through good and hard times, know that he is with us on the journey.