

Hope you have enjoyed our new outdoor Nativity Scene, near the bell tower. Jesus may be cold, but he is slumbering peacefully in the stable, and as usual, Joseph and Mary calmly watching over him. Silent night, sleep in heavenly peace. That's all from the Gospel of Luke.

But if we followed Matthew's version, it's hard even to imagine what the Nativity scene would be: a little house, surrounded by armed soldiers, kicking down the door. Perhaps the baby Jesus would be hidden under old rags, his parents terrified that he might cry and be discovered.

You remember how the Gospel of Matthew tells the story: Joseph takes Mary in and Jesus is born in the house. Magi see the star, stop in Jerusalem to ask King Herod for directions to find the newborn King of the Jews. Herod wants to know too----so he can have the baby destroyed. And when the Magi don't return to King Herod, he orders the execution of every boy around Bethlehem two years old and younger. And Joseph and Mary flee for their lives.

Hard for us to really believe, but every day, thousands of people flee for their lives. They are refugees—from places like Ivory Coast, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan. In the 70's, they were the "boat people," escaping Viet Nam with literally only the clothes on their backs.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus—who is maybe a year old—somehow make their way 200 miles to Egypt, which is not under Herod's rule. Mary the 15 year old refugee. Joseph the refugee. Jesus, Savior of the world, a refugee. It turns out that Egypt took a lot of Jews at that time: do you suppose any Egyptian saw them and said, "Oh no, more Jews! Why don't they stay home where they belong?"

But imagine Joseph not knowing the language, with no job, no money, no connections, and no home. He is a foreigner, trying to survive. And toddling behind him, still learning to speak properly, is the One who thirty years later will say, "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me."

Jesus, the stranger. Jesus, the foreigner arriving in Egypt. Jesus, with the accent and dark skin. Jesus, vulnerable and poor. Jesus, trying to find a welcome still. I just heard that, during this past year, 1 in 200 people in our country spent at least one night in a homeless shelter; 1 in 200. It's a 9% increase. The US conference of mayors says that 27% of requests for shelter are turned away: not enough room at the inn.

Meanwhile, Jesus is looking for a home in OUR home. Not a polite visit for an hour a week, not simply a crucifix hanging on the wall, but a living presence where we live. Is Jesus welcome? Is he welcome?