

## **“Jesus the Refugee”** **Matthew 2:13-23**

### **Introduction**

- 1. You’ve heard the story.** Dad and Mom call a family meeting around the kitchen table to tell their Junior High daughter they are moving to Phoenix. She smiles and tells them she will really miss them and hopes they will come back to visit.
- 2. My family moved twice while I was growing up, both times around my birthday in early October—when I had just started 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade.** The first move was less than a mile and the second was about five miles. Different towns, new schools and new neighborhoods. It was hard. Leaving friends behind. Feeling alone. I was scared.
- 3. Some say that the most difficult age for a child to move is around two years old.** The toddler is old enough to be upset by the change but too young to verbalize and understand. Jesus was not quite two.

### **4. Matthew 2:1-12**

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”*

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:*

*“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’”*

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”*

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

- 5. It was Herod and his palace staff that calculated Jesus’ age.** They figured out when the Magi first saw the star, how far they traveled and their rate of travel. It’s not like they figured it out to exactly December 25<sup>th</sup> but they knew that Jesus was almost but not yet two years old.

## **Bethlehem—dream becomes nightmare      Matthew 2:13**

1. **Bethlehem was the place where prophecies and dreams came true.** But it was also the place where the dream was turned into a nightmare.

### **Matthew 2:13**

*When they 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.”*

2. **To Egypt?** Another move? To another country? While it was only 80 miles from Bethlehem to Egypt it would be easier and faster for us to travel the 6814 miles from Minneapolis to Cairo.
3. **You would think that Bethlehem would be the safest place in the world for God’s Son to grow up.** But, the truth is that there is nowhere on earth that is completely safe. Urban, rural, foreign and domestic—there are dangers everywhere and Jesus was not exempt.

## **Night flight—crossing the border      Matthew 2:14-15**

1. **Matthew 2:14-15**

*So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”*

2. **Flight couldn’t wait until morning.** There wasn’t time to prepare and pack. Just get going before it’s too late. At most they probably gathered a few belongings along with the gold, incense and myrrh given by the Magi. There wasn’t time to say good bye. What little else they owned was left behind. They were refugees.
3. **Refugees are those who flee their homeland in fear.** There have always been refugees and there are millions today. Current estimates are that around ten million refugees are displaced today. Many are Christians—in Iraq there were 1.4 million Christians before the war and today there are around 500,000. Iraq has quickly gone from one of the safest places in the Middle East for Christians to one of the most dangerous.

Most refugees have little or no possessions, no legal status in another country, don’t speak the new language, and have no place to stay or to work. If they stay behind they may die and if they flee elsewhere they may be unwelcome and sent back home.

The US Department of State estimates that today there are 6.5 million people who are stateless—they have no citizenship, passport or legal status anywhere. The reasons are many—laws prohibit women to pass citizenship to their children, there are no birth records, political boundaries have changed and certain groups are targeted for discrimination. In America, if a refugee comes from Cuba he is welcomed to America; if he comes from Haiti he is sent back. It is never easy to be a refugee.

4. **Try to imagine what it was like for Joseph and family.** If it were today, travel from Bethlehem would be almost impossible because Bethlehem is surrounded by a high wall and the family of three would have no way to get out. Those who live in Bethlehem are Palestinians with little or no possibility of travel.

I’m sure that the gold, incense and myrrh added to the anxiety. They needed the money to live but had to be afraid of robbers who would kill for gold. Showing any of their small fortune risked exposing all they had.

(Imagine hiding \$10,000 in your pockets while traveling at night in desolate areas with bandits. One veteran international traveler told me that thieves will rob you for \$100 but murder you for \$10,000.)

What would it be like to reach the border of Egypt and be asked for documents? What is Joseph supposed to say, “I had a dream where an angel told me to come”? Most immigration officials don’t count dreams as documents.

And, once they arrived, where did they go? What did they do? Probably they sought out other Jews who had migrated to Egypt because that’s what most refugees do—try to find some of your own people who will take you in.

5. **What would you do?** If you thought your two-year-old would be killed if you stayed would you stay anyway? Most of us would cross a desert, swim a river or climb a mountain in order to save the life of a child. That’s what Joseph did. He put his life and Mary’s life at risk to save the life of Jesus.

6. **God Almighty left the glories of heaven and came to earth.** He became a refugee for our sakes. Scared. Crying. Cold. Sneaking. Running. Hiding. For us.

7. **Most of us have never been refugees.** We really have no idea what it must be like. But, we do face threats, fears, poverty and uncertainty. When we are frightened and lonely let us remember that Jesus has been there. He knows from personal experience what it is like to be scared.

8. **The historian Matthew quotes the Old Testament prophet Hosea (11:1) that the Son of God would be called out of Egypt.** It is a beautiful picture of similarity and solidarity with the Hebrew people who once were enslaved in Egypt until God brought them to the Promised Land. Jesus was like the people he was sent to save.

But, did you know that there were those who used this beautiful picture against Jesus? His critics and enemies claimed that he learned magic in Egypt and that was how he later performed miracles. They said that he was given demonic incantations that were tattooed on his body so he wouldn’t forget them and that his miracles were by the power of Satan not God. How shockingly sad that some insist on turning the goodness and greatness of God into something so shameful.

## **Back at Bethlehem—vicious slaughter Matthew 2:16-18**

1. **It was a good thing they fled.** Back in Bethlehem there was a vicious slaughter of innocent children.

**2. Matthew 2:16-18**

*When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:*

*“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”*

- 3. There are some scenes I try to imagine but this is not one of them.** Soldiers came to the town of Bethlehem and went on a search for boys under two. When found they were killed, probably run through with spears or strangled or crushed. Mothers and fathers watched their children die and were left with lifeless little bodies to bury.
- 4. Matthew quoted a poem from six centuries earlier when the youth of Israel were rounded up at the town of Ramah to be carried off as captives in Babylon.** Their mothers wailed in grief for the children they were losing. They could not be comforted. And that’s the way it was in Bethlehem. Mothers screamed in terror and wept in grief over the slaughter of their sons.
- This is why Jesus came...to save us from our sins.** And we are a human race of sinners. We take the lives of unborn babies. We commit genocide. We rape and rob and hate and kill. We are sinners with a long history of atrocities against one another. This is why we need a Savior. This is why God sent his Son. This is why Jesus came.

**Nazareth—home at last**

**Matthew 2:19-23**

- 1. Herod died in March 4 B.C. and the immediate threat against young Jesus passed.** (By the way, please don’t get worried about Jesus being born around 6 or 8 B.C. It isn’t that the Bible messed up his birth certificate. It’s that politicians and historians messed up the calendar.)
- 2. Matthew 2:19-23**
- After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”*
- So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”*
- 3. At last, Jesus was safe to grow up and die on the cross.**

## Conclusion

1. **Let's be sure to get the story straight.** Jesus was a baby. Jesus was a refugee. Jesus was vulnerable and at terrible risk. And, Jesus was God of very God, Supreme Deity, Creator of the Universe, Lord of lords and King of kings.

### **2 Corinthians 8:9**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

**The Son of God became a refugee so that we may have our home in heaven forever.**

2. **George Frideric Handel wrote his famous Oratorio *Messiah* in just 24 days during the summer of 1741.** It was first performed in Dublin, Ireland, and later in London with HRH King George II in the audience. When the oratorio came to the line that honors the refugee child as King of kings and Lord of lords, King George stood. When the king stands, everyone else stands too. But, the king was standing out of honor, reverence and worship for *the* King. He who ran for his life is the Supreme Ruler of the Universe.

3. **Traditional Service**

Several weeks ago 650 choristers from the Philadelphia Opera Company joined with the Wanamaker Organ (largest organ in the world) at the Macy's store in Philadelphia to sing praise to the refugee child who is the King of kings.

[Play Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wp\\_RHnQ-jgU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wp_RHnQ-jgU)] (5:59)

4. **Contemporary Services & The Gathering**

Last month (11/13/10) at the Welland Seaway Mall near Niagara Falls (ON, Canada) there was a musical surprise in the food court with singing to praise the refugee child who is the King of kings.

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE&feature=fvst>] (4:57)