

**Second Sunday of Christmas –Year C**  
**Jeremiah 31:7-14**  
**Psalm 84: 1-8**  
**Galatians 4:4-7 (from the Feast of the Holy Name)**  
**Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

It is easy to forget that Jesus was a refugee. Part of this, I guess, is that we identify Jesus so thoroughly with the Holy Land -- what we now call Palestine and Israel – that we forget things the gospel writers tell us about his early existence.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God,”* opens the Gospel of John, which we heard read last Sunday. Before the dawn of creation, our eternal God was. And the Word was inextricably with **“I AM”** -- as God named God’s self to Moses. The Word was spoken and the Spirit of God moved, and creation began.

Then as God deemed and saw fit, God became flesh and dwelt among us. Luke tells us the story that has caused so many to marvel and wonder: the Spirit of God entered Mary’s flesh, and the angel told her she would bear a son, whose name was to be Jesus.

But let’s stop right there, and realize that for God to become incarnate in Jesus, God had to accept a form of exile. God, who is beyond any human

idea or imagining, accepted the limitations and humiliations of being human. The Incarnation is the movement of the infinite into the finite, the eternal One at home into the temporal one in exile and the One whose will is the law of creation into one under the Law of Moses and Rome. Jesus was a refugee at the moment of his conception.

In the Letter to the Galatians, which we heard read this morning, Paul writes: *“When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.”*

So Jesus was born as a human under the burden of the law, which had forced his parents to leave Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem. And from there, we hear in today's gospel, they fled again, in the dark of night for fear of Herod's determination to kill the One that the scholars from the East were seeking. The little family had next to nothing in Bethlehem, and had to abandon even that.

We hear of refugee families from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, who have fled with only the clothes on their backs, for fear of the soldiers of ISIS and rebels and jihadists. Desperate to save their children from death and violence such as we can scarcely imagine, they have fled – ever westward,

through Turkey and Greece, the Balkans, Austria, Hungary, into Germany, France and the United Kingdom, becoming pariahs and exiles.

The little family of Joseph, Mary and the baby fled south, through Palestine, Gaza and into Egypt. Joseph had his carpenter's skills – but probably no tools. They were dependent upon the kindness of strangers, the charity of many. The strong tradition of hospitality that pervaded the Middle East until it was swept away by warfare and revolution kept them safe until Herod died.

The Syrian refugee families have walked across a continent, seeking the same hospitality, the same charity. If Joseph and Mary had not found theirs, there might not have been the rest of Jesus' story. What child is suffering today, in some detainment camp, some perilously fragile shelter, who our world will desperately need in twenty years?

Paul tells us that Jesus accepted exile from the Father so that we could be adopted as children of God. Because of this God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, so that we may cry out with Him: "Abba! Father!"

Do we hear the voices of the children calling out to us from their exile? As Jesus might have awakened in the strange land of Egypt, and called for Joseph in the middle of the night, can we hear the voices of the little ones who cry for their fathers in a strange land?

Then, Matthew tells us, obedient to the voice of the angel that directed him, Joseph packed up his few possessions and tried to return to Judea. But fearing Herod's son, Archelaus, he settled in his wife's home village of Nazareth, in the district of Galilee.

And the boy Jesus, named by the angel as God's exile, accepted a new identity in his new land. He would be known as a native of Nazareth, a Nazorean. What was this like for him? The chronology of those times is murky – historians believe that Jesus might have been two or three when Herod the Great died. Even at that age, he would have found the customs of Egypt far more homelike than the Galilean village his parents took him to. It was a homecoming for them. For him it must have been profoundly disorienting: more like being a Central American child brought to this country and raised here, then deported back to his home country. Jesus would have to adjust his very deep understanding of how the world works, and what his place in it might be. I suspect it marked him all his life.

Twice exiled, Jesus has much to teach us about the compassion and hospitality we must offer our fellow humans. And those lessons may well serve us better, if we understand that with the fading of the Christian hegemony we called Christendom, we too are exiles and aliens.

Back in 1989, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon wrote a visionary book called *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong*.

They predicted that within a few decades, our understanding of the United States as an essentially Christian country would have to change profoundly. They were right.

Let's take this short time after Christmas, before regular life begins again, to soberly reassess Jesus' position, the Syrian refugees' positions, the Central American children's' positions and our own, as resident Christian aliens. We have much in common, and we do well to ponder this.

And in the end, we may need to rest on Paul's reassuring words to the Galatians: ***“so you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”***

Jesus, Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, Mexican, Guatemalan, Sudanese, Christian. All the children of God, and heirs through God's Spirit.

***Amen.***