



Thoughts on the Journey...

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Imagine for a moment a poor young family being hunted for political reasons: hunted to kill their newly born child because of the threat the infant poses to a king.

Historians tell us that King Herod (or Herod the Great, as he liked to be called) was a vicious and cruel ruler who destroyed anyone he feared was trying to topple him from power. He even killed several members of his own family because he thought they were plotting against him.

Because of signs in the sky indicating the birth of the Messiah, a group of wise men (or scholars) came to Jerusalem shortly after Jesus was born. In earnest, they inquired as to where they could find the newborn king of the Jews? They added, "We have seen His star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2,). It didn't take long before word of their mission reached King Herod. Like anything that threatened him, he plotted to use these scholars to find Jesus. Herod sent for them and urged them to find the child, so he could worship him, too.

But Herod was deceiving them.. His real intent was to destroy the child, so there was no chance he could pose a threat to his kingship. God warned the wise men of Herod's plot in a dream, and the Magi avoided him.

In the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we read the story of the "Flight into Egypt" in which, after the birth of Jesus and the visit from the Magi, an "angel of the Lord" comes to Joseph in a dream and warns him to leave Bethlehem for Egypt (Mt 2:12-15). Why? Because King Herod was planning to "seek out the child to destroy him." Mary and Joseph do leave, along with Jesus, and, according to Matthew, make their way into Egypt. Afterward, King Herod slaughters all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age.

A refugee is someone who is forced to flee their country for fear of persecution, war or violence. Had Mary and Joseph not taken Jesus from their homeland and travel over 430 miles to safety in a foreign country, perhaps the outcome would be different.

In preparing for this reflection I couldn't help but think of the Holy Family and the many trials and challenges they endured to protect their son and our Savior. Imagining the scenes from their early life as a family, I could see the parallel between refugees today and the Holy Family then. Like most immigrants seeking safety and a better life for themselves and their loved ones, the risks and the hardships are many. If we all stop and put ourselves in the place of those who bear these hardships, what would you do? That was a question that was easy for me to answer: there is no question in my mind that I would do whatever I could to protect them, including making a journey to a foreign land.

Immigration is a word that conjures various reactions from compassion to suspicion to fear to frustration. At the heart of every opinion, is a person's point of reference that is either political, spiritual, social. They are opinions that usually resonate from a place of comfort, safety, and freedom. But for those who live in environments where violence, oppression, and fear rule the day, immigration is a word of hope: an opportunity to escape chaotic lives that are continually at risk and provide opportunity and protection for those they love.

We are blessed to live in a country where freedom and resources abound. That's the upside. But there is a risk of being so comfortable that we lose sight of those who suffer at the hands of cruel people. There is also the fears that come with opening our lives to strangers. There are no easy answers to the issue of immigration, just as there were no easy answers for Mary & Joseph. Love was at the heart of their flight, and love should be at the heart of what we do and how we think.