

Chaos Continues

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on December 28th 2025, (Matthew 2:13-23))

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As if a birth in a cave because there was no accommodation, after an arduous journey (because the occupying force wanted to count you so you could be taxed), when you are full term, and then visited by strange unnamed shepherds wasn't enough, then the visit of even stranger men bringing very expensive gifts and somehow knowing that the child in the manger was a child of significance, so significant they had even gone to the King to find out about it, the chaos continues.

These men from the East were warned not to go back to the King and tell them where and what they had found as they followed the star until it stopped. They return home by another route.

Before long the King realises they have tricked him and stopped him from ridding any potential threats to his power. He is enraged. Assuming the child of whom the Magi spoke would be no older than two years he sets about on a murderous plan – children would be slaughtered all because of one man's ego, one man who could not contemplate there might be another who could lead the people, who could lead the people in a completely different way – in a way of peace, compassion and non-violence, one who would put people first and not himself. Herod had the reputation of being a harsh and cruel ruler, and had an unsteady reign as he juggled an uneasy alliance between Rome and the Jerusalem political establishment, no wonder he was nervous.

Warned of such terror about to be unleashed, Joseph packs up what few possessions they have with them, and gathers his family and flees to the safest place he could find, to Egypt.

I can only imagine the fear of this young couple. They probably could only move about at night, so as not to be noticed. No doubt they had to rely on the compassion of others – perhaps to hide them, to feed them, to help out. I guess they would have avoided the main roads, took to the bush and scrub. Were there other families doing the same, in order to protect their families? It is unclear how long it took to get to Egypt, and if indeed it was safe there, nor do we know how long they stayed there. Only when they received news that Herod had died did they risk returning to Palestine. But not to Judea, as they were afraid of the son of Herod who had assumed rule, so instead they went to the region of Galilee to a little town called Nazareth.

Unfortunately fleeing to safer places from Palestine and other places continues. We know in the last couple of years that many times people have had to flee their homes to the north and to the south in Gaza due to a war being carried out by an occupied force and what is in effect a genocide. However, they couldn't get to Egypt to a little bit of safety, as the occupiers stood guard at the only point one could exit Gaza into Egypt. We know that throughout Myanmar people are constantly being displaced by the Junta both internally and into parts of India and Thailand and some of have found their way to Australia. We have in our congregation those who have fled Iran for fear of their life, because they could not abide the violent religious rule in that land and the lack of freedom and compassion, they and their families we forced to live by.

It is almost impossible for us who have grown up in or lived for a long time in Australia to understand the kind of fear, the trauma experienced, the anxiety, confusion and

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uncertainty that Jesus family and our Persian and Burmese brothers and sisters feel every day. I can only imagine just how hard it is to settle in a place where the people around have strange customs, speak a strange language, where it is difficult to find work or in some cases not permissible for you to work and yet, you have to eat, sleep and get medical care. How difficult it must be to have to rely on the kindness and/or pity of others, how difficult it must be to ever feel like you really belong. How difficult it must be to pay lawyers to help with visa applications only to be knocked back again and again, and then have to front up to tribunal hearings and be confronted with institutional racism, that presumes you are in the wrong and need to prove your worth? All because you are exercising the human right to live in safety and freedom.

It is estimated that in the middle of this year 117.3 million people are displaced in the world. Roughly 73 million are internally displaced (that is they are still in their own country but not in their own homes or towns or villages), about 36.4 million are refugees, about 8.4 million are seeking asylum and roughly 6.3 million are in need of international protection. This all equates to about 4 times the population of Australia.

On Christmas Day, I was speaking to some of our Persian members, and was heartbroken as they spoke of the trauma they experience after living here for well over a decade and yet still living with extreme uncertainty. They spoke of their pain of not seeing children grow up, of not seeing parents again and being so far away when they become ill and pass away. I cannot conceive of such pain and had no words and certainly no answers.

Jesus and his family were able to return to their homeland albeit to a new town. Jesus and his family knew the fear, the tragedy, the wickedness and the despair that many of our asylum seeker friends have known. He knew what it was like to be caught up in the politics of another, he knew about violence and the shedding of innocent blood. He knew about violence.

Jesus came to show us all that there must be another way – a way of welcome, a way of compassion, a way of peace, a way of love.

Jesus reveals to us a God who makes his home amongst us in the messiness of our world. Jesus reveals to us a God who shares in our pain and chaos.

Jesus, whom we celebrate at this time of the year, came as a vulnerable child, was part of a family who needed protection, was a refugee needing the compassionate embrace of those in another land.

As we look around us, around the world and see so many in need of welcome, of safety, of freedom – may we practice compassion, understanding, kindness and a generosity of Spirit. May we see in the face of all who are displaced, the face of Christ, who also knew the plight of a refugee and asylum seeker. Amen.