

Sermon: “Called to Walk the Road with the Refugee Christ”

Texts: Isaiah 63:7–9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10–18; Matthew 2:13–23

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The Christmas Journey Continues

Christmas often feels like a destination, especially when we arrive at Christmas Eve worship, sing the carols, light the candles, and rest in the glow of the manger. But the Scriptures for the Sunday after Christmas remind us that for Jesus, Christmas was not a destination. It was a beginning. So, preaching this Sunday is not a departure from festival preaching, though we will return to unfolding the Gospel on every Sunday-after-Sunday.

Dreams are nightmarish experiences. How about the three dreams that Joseph had after the magi departed? Are they good or bad? The first one seemed promising, but it includes an instruction to flee Israel and go to Egypt with his wife and baby Jesus. The nightmare does not end when Joseph awakes. There is a frenzy of activity: stuffing together whatever they have, walking down to the street and out the gate into the main road to get to Egypt as fast as possible, the child crying, the mother exhausted, Joseph’s heart clutching in his throat every time he sees a

soldier. Before the shepherds went back to tend to their flocks' safety, before the magi returned home, the Christ child was already on the move—fleeing violence, carried swiftly into the night by parents who were trying to protect him from the fear of a threatened king. We encounter three commands that necessitated Joseph and Mary fleeing with baby Jesus to Egypt: an angel's command, a ruler's command, and, again, an angel's command. The departure-and-return motif discussed in this scriptural passage is analogous to the Israelites' exile in Egypt and their subsequent return to the land of Canaan. There was also a dream scene in the Old Testament involving another Joseph. There was also the killing of babies in these two exile stories. In both stories, we are reminded that God's initiatives drive all human actions, and we are called to walk with God, especially in this context, alongside the refugee Christ.

Matthew tells us plainly: *“Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt.”*

The holy family becomes a refugee family. The Savior we worship begins his earthly life displaced, hunted, and homeless.

Christmas joy often clashes with the world's pain. How should we interpret God's call for an unexpected shift in human plans, as shown in Herod's plot and the flight of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph? What does God's strategy involve in linking the birth of the Messiah with the suffering and death of innocent baby boys two years old

and under? What provision does God offer after carrying out these commands? Here is the path Jesus invites us to travel, reflecting His status as a refugee. If the first dream was a nightmare, the second dream offers temporary relief. It gives hope to Joseph and his family. Herod is dead. The tyrant is gone. You can return home. You no longer need to be among people who speak a different language. You can have the food you missed so long. You can chat in your local language and be in a familiar neighborhood. No sooner do they arrive than the old nightmare returns. Herod is gone, but Archelaus, his son, who takes over his father's cruelty, is ruling over Judea. Joseph was afraid to go there. Then he had the third dream, instructing him to go further north to Galilee. The path travelled was complex, tiring, uncertain, lonely, and life-threatening, leaving one alone and abandoned. Yet, God always stood near to them.

1. When we flee for our lives and are left abandoned, God still remembers and stays Near

Isaiah 63 begins with remembrance: *“I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord... because of all that the Lord has done for us.”* Isaiah addresses a people who feel abandoned and uprooted. He wants them to remember: God has walked with them before, and God walks with them still. Isaiah presents God as one who enters suffering, not one who avoids it. *“In all their distress, he too was distressed.”* God is not distant but deeply present. The Christ who becomes a

refugee is the clearest expression of this truth: God does not stay above the world's pain. God steps directly into it. God gives us protective care in our uncertain times. As God protected the Messiah from the threat of death, so will God protect us in our times of loneliness, bad news, displacement in our jobs, relationships, and in our life journeys towards an unknown destination.

2. Christ, the refugee, joins us fully in our displacement.

Hebrews 2 anchors our theme: *“He became like his brothers and sisters in every respect... so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.”*

Christ does not redeem us from a safe distance. Christ redeems us by walking our road.

He shares flesh and blood, tears and hunger, danger and displacement. And because he has walked the refugee road, he can walk with all who walk it still: Immigrant parents clutching their children on uncertain borders, families uprooted by violence, people forced from homes by economic hardship, and anyone whose life has been thrown off course by fear or power abused. The refugee Christ understands. The refugee Christ stands beside them. The refugee Christ stands beside us.

3. Who was really threatened in Jesus' flight to Egypt? It is the story of a threat to Power and of the love of a refugee who stands courageously.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus threatens Herod not because he brings armies or politics, but because he brings **love and servanthood**. Herod fears losing control, losing status, losing the illusion of power. And so he lashes out. Violence almost always begins with fear.

And love—true love—almost always threatens those who cling to control. The church must remember this: When we follow Christ's way of compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and sacrificial service, we will eventually encounter Herod-like forces in our own time. Systems built on domination do not welcome a savior who leads by humility. But Matthew also shows us something else: Even when human power tries to crush God's purposes, God quietly undermines those powers. A warning dream, a nighttime escape, a family protected. Herod's violence is loud, but God's providence is steady. Herod does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Fear does not have the last word. God's steadfast love has the last word. And so our worship today becomes resistance to the world's despair.

4. Our Calling is to Walk the Road with the Refugee Christ

What does it mean to follow a Christ who begins life on the run?

a. We walk with compassion. We see Christ in the stranger, the migrant, the unhoused, the displaced. The church becomes a place of refuge because we follow a Savior who was once a refugee.

b. We walk with courage. Not every call from God will lead us down a safe road. Sometimes discipleship leads us into contexts in which power is threatened, and suffering is real. But Christ walks ahead of us.

c. We walk with hope. The flight into Egypt is not the end of the story. The child survives. God's promise holds. Herod's reign ends, but Christ's reign of love continues.

d. We walk with purpose. To follow Christ is to step into the world's wounds—not to fix everything, but to be present, to love boldly, to act justly, and to bear witness to God's compassion.

Conclusion: The Road Begins at the Manger

The manger is beautiful, but it was never meant to be the final scene. The manger points us to the road, a road marked by love, struggle, and hope, and a road walked by Christ and now offered to us. This week, as the glow of Christmas fades, may we hear the same call Joseph heard: **“Get up... take the child... and go.”** Go into the world. Go into its suffering. Go with courage. Go with love. Go with the One who knows the refugee road because he has walked it—and who walks it with us still. Amen.