

Peace Refugee from Human Violence

Thomas Robinson, *Good News of God with Us 2*, December 8, 2019

Matthew 2:1-18

¹ After **Jesus was born in Bethlehem** in Judea, during the time of **King Herod**, **Magi** from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “*Where is the one who has been born **king of the Jews**? We saw **his star** when it rose and have come to worship him.*”

³ When King **Herod** heard this he was **disturbed**, and **all Jerusalem** with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s **chief priests** and **teachers of the law**, he asked them **where the Messiah was to be born**.

⁵ “*In **Bethlehem** in Judea,*” they replied, “*for this is what **the prophet** has written:*

⁶ *‘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 **shepherd** my people **Israel**.’” [Micah 5:2-3]*

⁷ Then **Herod** called the **Magi** secretly and found out from them the **exact time** the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.*”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When **they saw the star**, they were **overjoyed**. ¹¹ On coming to the **house**, they saw **the child** with his mother **Mary**, and they bowed down and **worshipped** him. Then they opened their **treasures** and presented him with gifts of **gold**, **frankincense** and **myrrh**.

¹² And having been warned in a **dream** not to go back to Herod, they **returned to their country** by another route.

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.***”

¹⁴ So he got up, **took the child and his mother** during the **night** and left for **Egypt**, ¹⁵ where he **stayed** until the death of Herod.

And so was filled up what the Lord had said through the **prophet**:

“Out of Egypt I called my son.” [Hosea 11:1]

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet **Jeremiah** was filled up:

¹⁸ *“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.**”* [Jeremiah 31:15]

Micah 5:2-4

² But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, | who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, | from you shall come forth for me | one who is to be ruler in Israel, | whose coming forth is from of old, | from ancient days. |

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time | when she who is in labor has given birth; | then the rest of

his brothers shall return | to the people of Israel. | ⁴ And he shall endure and shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh, | in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God. | And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great | to the ends of the earth.

Jeremiah 31:13b, 15-17a

¹³ I will turn their mourning into joy, | I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. | ...

¹⁵ Thus says Yahweh: | A voice is heard in Ramah, | lamentation and bitter weeping. | Rachel is weeping for her children; | she refuses to be comforted for her children, | because they are no more. | ¹⁶ Thus says Yahweh: | Keep your voice from weeping, | and your eyes from tears; | ... they shall come back from the land of the enemy; | ¹⁷ there is hope for your future.

Refugee, Exile, Alienation – Home

Advent & Christmas present positive images of Peace & Love. It's striking that the Gospels don't edit the story of Jesus' birth for sweetness and uplift. The event of Jesus enters the long story of human separation, alienation from God & each other. God strives to bring us back home, to reality, to real life. We're refugees who enjoy our exile and have set up life in it with our own power structures, pretending all is fine. Exile is all there is. We don't need a Creator. Alienation hits every level: our hearts, relationships, societal/political structures, a break of earth from heaven. Can anything really New break in?

Matthew tells the story highlighting the irony of our broken, violent home in exile that we humans create, and how God breaks into that false reality by unexpected wanderers.

Magi in the World of King Herod

Herod is at home – a fear-flooded, subordinate, power-hungry king of the Jews. The Magi are mysterious eastern philosophers studying stars. They're far from home but following cosmic signs to find the King of the Jews. They upset those who should seek and know, those at home in alienation – no place to put a Messiah. Priests paraphrase Micah 5:2 for Herod. Tools to manipulate the Magi. Build a glorious temple but kill God's Messiah.

But the Magi aren't at home in Herod's world. They follow a star with joy to a baby & mother. Herod has the soldiers, priests, money, empire, powers of deceit and coercion. But if their sign is true, something totally different is breaking in. God's bringing a new world to birth. These wanderers see something. They give kingly gifts not to Herod but to a nobody.

Life & Death and Death & Life

We watch the violent, fear-filled empire of alienation strike. Joseph's dream warns him, and they flee by night into exile in Egypt – like Israel in Egypt, Assyria, Babylon – humanity alienated from God. The Messiah flees as a refugee – ironically, in exile from Herod's exile. The family lost everything. The Messiah embodies, shares, Israel's & humanity's exile.

Enraged Herod shows the depravity of thwarted power in his false Home. To get this child, he orders death for all Bethlehem's baby boys. They don't get Jesus this time, but the baby is weak, fleeing. Herod's kind of power will crucify this child. The reality of alienation.

Mt lets us look at the horror. He cites Jeremiah 31. Weeping over the destruction of Israel, real grief that can't be assuaged in exile. But the grief is in a story of God's grace. This baby has already emptied himself. He comes as an exile from God's realm into our exile. He comes with vulnerable love to unite heaven & earth, God's home & ours, God's Life!