

AFTER THE CHORUS OF ANGELS

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Christmas is always a big production. Family members gather from near and far. We all enjoy a beautiful Christmas tree, stockings, lights, special drinks, lots of delicious food and presents! There are Christmas parties, worship services, pageants, caroling and charitable events. The holiday season is a busy time.

The story of Jesus' birth is also something of a big production. We know how big it can be as we stage it year after year in St. John's *Christmas Show*. Mary and Joseph, the inn keeper, towns folk, shepherds, those amazing angels singing in the night sky, sheep, camels, cows and donkeys, and then the dramatic entrance of the three wise men. This year at St. John's we are capping off the telling of the story with a Festival of Christmas Lessons and Carols. Normally the Festival of Lessons and Carols concludes with the reading of John 1:1-18, *in the beginning was the Word, etc.* That's a grand kind of conclusion. It's a stunning theological image, that God's pre-existent Word, God's life, has taken shape and form and substance and life itself in the birth of the baby Jesus. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

This year I have chosen to end the Festival of Lessons and Carols with a different Gospel story. Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 is one of the choices for Gospel readings on this 2nd Sunday in Christmas. This life of God, this *Logos*, this *Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us*, is at risk. This tiny baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger is in very grave danger of being killed by the powerful political interests of King Herod. So, God sends Joseph a dream and Mary, Joseph and the baby must flee in the middle of the night.

They are refugees, this young family. First, having to travel to a distant town to be registered, then to have to flee in the night and walk hundreds of miles to another country, to Egypt and eventually under a different administration to unobtrusively slip back into their own country. It's certainly a story of comings and goings, of danger, escapes and near misses.

One thing it's not is *grand*. It's not a big production. The baby Jesus quietly slips away with his parents Mary and Joseph into the night, into obscurity. In fact we don't see him again until nearly 30 years later as he's standing in line to be baptized by his cousin John. It's not a grand conclusion to a Festival of Lessons and Carols, but it does tell us something important about the good news that God has come among us in the birth of this baby boy in Bethlehem.

The grand finale to God coming among us, being born as one of us is not a star or wise men or light shows or the rich harmony of organ pipes, but rather in a family and a child who goes into hiding. God's life born among us goes into hiding in the midst of a dangerous and unfriendly world. God's life among us is found in exile and in strange places as well as it is also found at home. God's story is a story lived in solidarity with refugees and the poor. God's story is lived in solidarity with travelers, with children at risk, with those who are hungry and in need. It is a life and story shared with all the

peoples of the world, with God's chosen people in Israel and with the nations represented by Egypt.

The *Word* was made flesh; the *Word* dwelt among us. That life, which was the life of the world lived and grew up among us, a very human life, a life lived in the challenges and politics and uncertainty of human life. A life lived in the type of challenges and dangers and uncertainties that we face every day. God has touched our world, not on a grand stage, but on a very human stage. We don't have to look to find and be found by God on the grand stage with special effects or special lighting, in reverential tones or just in sacred spaces. For it is in the midst of the challenges and dangers and uncertainties and obscurity of life as we live it that God's life is to be found. And that is good news indeed.