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Matthew 2:13-23
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Blue Christmas

Good morning church, and Happy New Year.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, our cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Amen.

What kind of Christmas and New year do we have today? For some, this was a Merry Christmas, overflowing with family time and gathering around a full table. For others, this was a white Christmas, full of winter storms and maybe a few plane delays. While for others, this was a blue Christmas, without loved ones or with sickness as an overshadowing force. For me, it was Merry. I was so happy to have my mother visit me, and my church family invited me to celebrate with them.

Nevertheless, this text demands that I consider the Merry and Blue of Christmas. Not because of guilt or shame. Not because we must compete at who has suffered the most. But because joy and suffering have their place in Christ's story and our own stories. Joy and suffering are inextricably linked together. So let us listen to Jesus's story and how it might teach us about God, Jesus, and ourselves.

Jesus is a political refugee. Our 2022 began by welcoming an Afghan family into our family. We welcomed them as well as we could, settling them into a home, taking them to appointments, and finally saying goodbye as they found a community that could speak their language. It was tough work, we could not speak their language, and they came from a different culture. I wonder what it must have been like for Joseph and Mary, fleeing from their home. Were they welcomed in Egypt? I can think about Joseph's family, welcomed, yes. Still, also Pharaoh told Joseph's family could settle here but away in the land of Goshen because shepherds were considered Toavah, or in English, an abomination. It's the same word Leviticus uses to describe wearing clothing of two different threads or eating pork.

I wonder if the Egyptians thought about Jesus's family that way, welcomed but happy to see them leave after Herod's death. so this Sunday after Christmas, let us consider that joy and suffering. The joy of escape mingled with an uneasy welcome and those lost.

For Matthew, Jesus will be the new Moses. When we read about the massacre of the children and return from Egypt, readers are reminded of how Pharaoh ordered the death of the children and Moses, one of those children sentenced to death, freed the Hebrew slaves, and led them on an

Exodus to a land God would show them. The joy of Jesus's promise of freedom from oppressors is mixed with the profound loss experienced under the Roman boot.

Today, I am joyful for what I have and sorrowful that this world is still full of pain and loss. All of our pain still counts, no matter if this is the pain of sickness, missing family, or anything else. Whether this Christmas was full of joy or pain, this text shows how both are mixed together in Jesus's first Christmas.

So what does this text say to this church today? To people whose spiritual or literal ancestors were refugees of religious persecution who fled to the United States. What does this text say to a church with current immigrants and refugees fleeing war and gangs? Jesus is leading us through the wilderness, who is like Moses, to figure out how the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is different from the God of Pharaoh and Herod.

The way of Pharaoh and Herod is marked by fear. Fear of the other, be they immigrant Hebrews or an occupied native. Both kings were worried about losing power and another group of people becoming too powerful and rising against them. Exodus reads, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."

While the Egyptian midwives and Magi mark the way of Jesus. Who opposed the way of Pharaoh and Herod with subversive love. Lying to Pharaoh saying the Hebrew mothers give birth so quickly or like the Magi returning home another way. So as we greet a new year, 2023, this text calls me to follow the way of Jesus, welcoming the refugee and proclaiming liberation for all who lie in bondage.