

**Second Sunday after Christmas
Year C
Jan 2.2022
Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar
Christ Church Towanda, PA 18848**



Aliens, Immigration and Refugees

Our 21st century is witnessing the movement of millions across borders. This phenomenon can be due to many reasons, Labels are assigned to displaced people which reflect their various circumstances.¹

A refugee is a person who is forced to abandon their place of origin because of a natural disaster or to escape a war zone or the threat of violent persecution. They may be able to accomplish this on their own or with the assistance of an international agency such as Episcopal Migration Ministries²

¹ Joel B Green *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* Baker Publishing Group. pg. 53-55.

² *Ibid*

An immigrant refers to a person who leaves home willingly in order to have a short or long term residence somewhere else. This may be to find employment or to better provide for their family.

Migration and its effects are major topics in both the old and new testaments....2

We meet Jesus in today's Gospel account as a refugee. When he was a small child, Jesus and his family fled to Egypt to avoid Herod's rampage. There is no information about the length of their sojourn in Egypt, but at that time, there was a large, long standing Jewish community there. Jesus lived as a refugee in a foreign land, and so life in another place as a displaced person was a large part of his personal experience.

It has to be one of the most extraordinary Christmas trees ever imagined. Twelve feet high, glowing in was created by an artist out of the lifejackets of Syrian refugee children who had safely reached the island of Lesbos on boats. For that Christmas season, this sculpture had been installed inside the entrance of St. Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia, because—as the Dean of Melbourne says—it is “a reminder that Jesus and his family became refugees almost immediately after his birth. It is an invitation to us to open our hearts to help people displaced by war and conflict.”

“Jesus and his family became refugees”; indeed they did. Matthew 2:13-15 makes this clear. “An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.”

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee agency, there are now more than 60 million refugees and displaced people worldwide. Currently, ninety five percent of Afghan

people do not know where their next meal is coming from. This is the largest number of refugees the world has known anytime since World War II. We have them in our own country displaced mostly by natural disasters such as floods and fires. Displacement globally today is of biblical proportions. It seems like only a few days go by before we hear of cataclysmic disasters.

There are three durable solutions for refugees: repatriation, integration, and resettlement. Thankfully, in many cases, refugees are able to repatriate or return to their home countries once the conflicts there have ceased and civil society has stabilized. Other refugees, who may not be able to return home, are able instead to integrate into the country of first asylum – the country to which they fled for safety. The remaining group of refugees – less than 1 in 100 refugees – is resettled to another nation.

3

I was glad to learn that in our own diocese of Bethlehem, the Church of the Mediator in Allentown, Pa. assists in welcoming refugees new to their neighborhood. I have included in my printed sermon, links for you to access their Facebook page and learn more. Right now, the United States is in the midst of resettling Afghan evacuees at a rate of as many as 4,000 per week, with a goal of beginning to assimilate nearly 75,000 of them in six months into towns, cities and suburbs.

In far-flung places around the nation, there is little political pushback as the evacuees become more numerous and visible. One reason is that U.S. veterans, former soldiers and Marines, have their backs. Having fought side by side with and depended critically on their Afghan interpreters, fixers and guides, those veterans are going to bat for their former comrades in arms, officials say. ⁴ Thankfully, this sentiment crosses the political divides.

³ www.episcopalmigrationministries.org

⁴ Facebook page - Church of the Mediator Allentown, Pa. Dec. 25, 2021

Prayer for Refugees Shared by the Refugee Community Center at the Episcopal Church of the Mediator (Allentown), Diocese of Bethlehem:

God our Creator: We ask for your loving presence and for your peace to be with refugees in our local communities and around the world. Be with all who are in fear. Be with those whose lives and livelihoods are under threat, and whose religious freedoms are being compromised. Be with us as we strive to enact your will in our welcome and support of refugees. Be with those in positions of leadership, that their decisions may bend toward peace and not division, and that they might realize the power they hold to do justice. Give us all strength and courage. Equip and empower us to be witnesses to your love – as advocates and as servants, as ministers of welcome and bearers of hope, especially for those seeking refuge. In your Holy name we pray. Amen.

Resources for further reflection :

Refugee Community Center at Church of the Mediator

Community Organization

The Refugee Community Center widens our welcome to refugees who are new to the neighborhood, offering radical hospitality & authentic relationship in our daily lives.

1620 W. Turner Steet Allentown, PA 18102

<http://Episcopalmediator.org/refugee-center>

<http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/>