

**Epiphany I, "The Journey"**  
**Matthew 2:13-21**  
**Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, January 3, 2010**

Here we are, the first Sunday of the New Year, gathered around our Lord's Table to remember Jesus.

Quite frankly, I can't think of a better place to be. These past weeks we've been rehearsing the first night of Jesus' life and today we remember how on his last night our Lord summed up and put into perspective the impact and purpose of his mission on earth.

During this time of year we experience even more the deep yearning to be home for Christmas, but as we celebrate the birth of Jesus do we realize Jesus and his parents were themselves far away from home? Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Nazareth, and then soon after his birth the holy family became refugees, as Joseph was warned in a dream to take the child and flee into Egypt until it was safe to return home.

And then, as Jesus began his ministry, once again he left home, to wander the hills and valleys of the Promised Land, healing the sick, comforting the distressed and all the while proclaiming **"The Kingdom of God is here."**

Once again, note Jesus never had a home of his own. He slept under the stars or occasionally was the guest of friends and followers. Do you remember his lament to a potential disciple? **"Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."**

Jesus was born to wander, to be on a journey that sometimes took him deep into the wilderness, but always into the presence of God. When you think about it, Jesus' life was a reflection of the life of Israel. Throughout their long history, starting with Abraham, and then during their 430 years in bondage in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness and next in exile in Babylon and then after 70 AD when the Romans dispersed the Jews throughout the world, the people of Israel, God's chosen people, lived as refugees in search of their true home deep in the heart of God.

At Christmas time, we're culturally conditioned to yearn for home. Being in a safe place surrounded by family and friends is the ideal. But even if that happens and those we know and love the best are all gathered in the same place at the same time, we're still never completely satisfied because we have an even deeper yearning to be physically, emotionally and spiritually whole.

So, like the holy family as they fled into Egypt, we find ourselves on a journey sometimes bearable, other times desperate. Being a refugee isn't fun. But being uprooted and forced to wander far from home is an integral part of the human experience because only then do we find meaning, purpose and God's grace.

Today, you may find yourself spiritually in the middle of nowhere. Despite all your holiday celebrations you may be feeling very alone, frustrated and afraid. You may even be at the most vulnerable time in your life. So if you are tired, afraid and lonely no matter where you are in your journey, know this: this sacred meal is for you. Jesus invites and encourages you to taste and see the Lord is good. In the gospel stories whenever Jesus came upon anyone who was down and out, he never put conditions on them. Instead, he always accepted people wherever they were on their journey.

The same is true today. Jesus takes you just as you are and then loves you into the Kingdom. And there, as you grow into Christ, you discover your truest humanity simply by following that same path Jesus took when he walked the earth 2,000 years ago, the path of love, service and at times sacrifice.

Let me conclude with a lovely child's legend about the holy family when they were refugees on their way to Egypt. Joseph, Jesus and Mary sought shelter in a cave one night. It was so cold the ground was covered with frost. A little spider saw and recognized the baby Jesus and wanted to do something to keep him warm and the spider decided the only thing he could do was to spin a web across the entrance of the cave to make a kind of curtain. Later that night a detachment of soldiers came along seeking children to kill as they carried out Herod's bloodthirsty orders. When they came to the cave the captain of the guard noticed the spider's web in the moonlight covered with frost. He concluded no one could possibly be in the cave or they would have torn the spider's web. So the soldiers passed on and left the holy family in peace.

Do you know that this legend, so some say, is why we put tinsel on Christmas trees? The glittering tinsel stands for the spider's web, white with frost, which kept the little refugee Christ child safe in the cave.

Perhaps it's just a legend, but like all legends, the truth behind it is powerful. When you are in Christ sometimes on the journey you will face danger in the wilderness, God weaves around us, a web of grace.

His grace surrounds us as we gather around his table. Taste His grace as we eat the bread and drink the wine and claim your identity as one of His holy refugees as we celebrate His birth, death and resurrection for our sakes.

Let us pray!