

SPREADING LIGHT  
Baptism of the Lord/Feast of the Holy Innocents  
Matthew 2:13-23  
Sunrise Presbyterian Church  
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We KNOW the Christmas story: we know about Mary and Joseph - we know how they journeyed to Bethlehem for the census and that the baby was born while they were there. We know all about the shepherds keeping watch in the fields. We know the angels' song - we know what the shepherds saw - we even know about the little drummer boy who had no gift but music to bring the king. We know this story, and we think we know it well.

Yet we rarely read and ponder the part of the story from Matthew's version which we read this morning. Recall there are no shepherds in Matthew's story - there's no overflowing inn or a baby born in a manger. These parts of Luke's story are so crucial to the way that we KNOW the Christmas story - that we often assume Matthew included them. Matthew, however, tells a different story.

Matthew does not tell us about Jesus' birth. Instead we learn of the birth through Wise Men from the East who arrive in Bethlehem asking, "Where is the child, who has been born king of the Jews?" Strangers and foreigners proclaim the messiah's birth in this gospel. There's no tender maternal scene of bliss. Instead, Matthew offers political intrigue between King Herod and his advisors. The child escapes to Egypt as a refugee - those children who did not make it out of the city are murdered. A dark cloud surfaces over the story. I've often noted that it's not a very pretty story. It's not the stuff for Christmas cards.

And yet, it is the stuff for us this year. All through December the Syrian city, Aleppo, has been under siege. It's not the first city we've known to be besieged and captured - many others have suffered similar fate, but it is the first city to do so since the advent of social media. All month we read texts and tweets from starving mothers - a little girl named, Bana, who wanted a Harry Potter book. We learned more than we wanted to know about the brigade called the "White Hats" who tried to offer medical help to anyone who needed it. We learned that there was no medicine - that hospitals were barrel bombed - that makeshift hospitals were bombed. We read about little girls losing their dolls in the bombing - as well as their parents. One video clip I cannot forget showed a woman walking up and down a corridor of a makeshift hospital. She held two children by their hands - their apartment had been blow away. She hoped they might find a parent.

Not only did we read these stories - we waited in agony as the green buses finally arrived to take these people away to some semblance of safety. We learned the buses were late - never arrived - were sometimes torched. Nothing was safe. I had the feeling that Anne Frank was tweeting as the Nazi's were approaching her hiding place. History is full of such terrible tales.

That's why it matters that THIS year is the time in which we read about baby Jesus as an undocumented refugee. This year is the year we read that his parents fled political terror - this year is the year that we must imagine the holy family lived in a refugee camp - imagine them in a UN tent city. All December, I kept imagining Mary and Joseph waiting for one those green buses in Aleppo. I saw them huddled in the cold in line with the other families, desperate to get away - waiting hours and days - afraid to lose their place in line.

Jesus was born into the most frightening circumstances we can imagine - Emmanuel - God with us - came not as a pretty little baby - but as part of a poor, unwanted refugee family. Emmanuel came as the very least of us. Emmanuel came as a person we probably would not even notice or - forgive us! --we might disparage. Emmanuel came as one of the countless refugees of our world.

That is the "crack where the light gets in." Emmanuel sheds God's light in the deep darkness of our world. He lights a candle - he sleeps among the unwanted --- he invites others to share his light - He brings a glimmer of hope to brighten our dark world.

Edith Wharton once wrote: "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." Emmanuel lit a flame in Bethlehem and began spreading it everywhere he went. The disciples - the followers - we - we begin to reflect that light. We become as mirrors held up to that candle. Others see light in our reflection - others see hope in our actions - others see the gentleness of God who would not bruise a reed or extinguish a flame.

This Epiphany season I want to focus on how we can be light for the world. I want us to explore how we reflect Emmanuel's light - how we shine light for those who sit in deep darkness. We hear people say - "I can do nothing. I have no power." There was, indeed, little we could do as we heard the dire news from Aleppo. Yet those haunting messages sent out light which shone upon me - and hopefully upon you and countless others around the world. Their light reflects upon me and thence upon you - and let us hope - thence upon others. Their light should remind us of Emmanuel the refugee. How do we reflect Christ's light? We will be exploring some ways we might find this light over the next few weeks.

And while we do that - let's recall the words of our own Ann Zimmerman -

The light ---- is coming.  
The light is coming back.  
Darkness may reign for a moment,  
But the light is coming back.<sup>ii</sup>

The light is coming back because it is already here with us. Emmanuel calls us to light our candles against the wind. Emmanuel calls us to spread the light into the darkest corners of our world. Shall we light our candles? Alleluia! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Edith Wharton, *Versaluis in Zante*

<sup>ii</sup> Ann Zimmerman, "Winter Solstice: Hymn for Dark Times"