

You may find it hard to believe but 55 years ago in the time between 6th form and college I spent two gap years in a variety of jobs one of which was two terms as a primary school teacher in East London. I was totally untrained to teach so as you can imagine it was both challenging for the children and even more so for me! I was quite good at telling stories and getting the kids to draw pictures of the story.

The first week back after Christmas I told them the same story that we have just heard from today's Gospel reading - The flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt. One child's drawing I particularly remember was of an aeroplane. It was standing on the ground with two figures climbing aboard behind them was a long string with a tiny dot on the end. When asked to explain the budding artist proudly announced to his dumb teacher that was Mary and Joseph and the flea going on their flight to Egypt.! Biblical interpretation!

If that memory always makes me smile. Today's gospel reading is anything but. Here we are just 4 days after Christmas, and we are back in the very real world of refugees, massacres, tyrannical despots.

What does this story have to say to us?

Although in our worship and Christian traditions we celebrate Christmas right through the twelve days to Epiphany and even beyond until Candlemas in the world outside of church life goes on.

For Mary and Joseph moving on meant fleeing to Egypt - The situation was desperate. Herod was feeling under threat by the rumours of a new king having been born as a result he decided to kill all young boys under two.

As in last week's Gospel reading it was an angel who warned Joseph of the threat of Herod.

Herod was known as Herod the Great because in worldly terms he was a very astute and savvy leader he was not at all mad.

His economic policies had put Judea on the map. He had invested in keeping the status quo and so a price had to be paid to protect the prosperity of Judea. I wonder if there might be echoes of similar things happening today when the price to pay for maintaining the status quo is the suppression and sometimes the death of those who are poor helpless vulnerable.

What a contrast between Herod's kingship and the kingship which God brings to us and which we see in the baby in the manger and then in the life ministry and death of Jesus himself.

Looking around the world today and we still see lives being expendable for economic reasons we still have despotic regimes and leaders.

Mary and Joseph lived in that same sort of world - risk and uncertainty were huge for them as they are for so many people. The last year has been described as a difficult one who knows what the next year or next decade will bring.

The extraordinary and revolutionary thing about our faith is that God came into this messy world to be with us. Joseph listened to his dreams and to his angels which begs the question do we? God may not speak to us in the form of angels and dreams can be very odd although they can be very good guides.

Despite the horrors that we hear about in today's Gospel and in today's world that is absolutely no reason not to give great thanks and praise to God for coming to us and being with us.

Psalm 148 is not only a great outpouring of praise by the angels but by the whole of creation. Mountains hills snow and fog sun and moon - all of creation is invited to give praise to God because he has come among us shared our broken world with us and shown us what it is to be truly human.