

December 29 2019 Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

After they had left, 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.

The journey to Egypt was at least 65 kilometres but was an appropriate destination as Herod had no political powers there. However, he did have spies abroad and to avoid them Joseph, Mary and Jesus moved locations frequently. In total, there are 26 different locations that are believed to have been places of refuge or just places passed through by the family in hiding. Many of the places are now the sights of monasteries or churches, some are rocks with a specific shape, some are freshwater springs and one is a tree with branches that bow down. These sites are valued highly by the Coptic Church in Egypt and there are some Egyptian tourist companies that run expeditions to these historic locations for those that are visiting the area.

After three and a half years of continual traveling, an angel appeared to Joseph again, telling him that it was safe to return home as Herod had now died. Today many people still have the need to flee from violent, unacceptable situations, but, unlike Joseph, Mary and Jesus, they are unable to return to their homes, even after long periods of absence. In the last decade in areas of Africa and the Middle East violent conflicts have seen millions of people fleeing from war torn homes, able to take nothing with them as they search for safer places for themselves and their families. Refugee camps are full of displaced people who are unable to stay in their own countries and aid agencies do their best with limited funds to meet the health and educational needs of the people in them and to give them hope for a brighter future.

Within our own community, people flee from their homes for a variety of reasons. Some have been victims of domestic violence or other forms of abuse, some flee from the effects of natural disasters, like floods, earthquakes or, as we are very aware at the moment, the devastating effects of bushfires. As all of these people flee to safer places, we hope and pray with them, and for them that their circumstances improve.

The Bible contains other stories of people fleeing from harsh conditions. Moses and the Israelites fled from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea, Naomi and her husband fled from famine in Bethlehem to Moab, David fled from Saul when he was trying to kill him and Jonah attempted to flee from doing God's work in Nineveh. All these stories have one thing in common. God was always with those who were on the run. He stayed with them and even if things didn't go how the people might have planned initially, they did improve eventually. There was always hope for the future.

In Australia, in the last 60 years many people have moved here with hopes for better lives. As a child my family moved from England to Australia in 1968, not to flee from anything terrible, but to improve our opportunities for the future. Many others also migrated from Europe and Britain around the same time as us, and most stayed on, enjoying the Australian way of life and the greater prospects it offered. Following the Vietnam War many refugees came to our shores also full of hope seeking better lives for themselves and their families. Our Governor, The Honourable Hieu Van Le, arrived with his wife Lan in 1977 and after furthering his studies in Economics, Accounting, and Business Administration at Adelaide University, went on to work as a certified practicing accountant

which included time at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. He led many high-profile matters and was a senior manager in the Commission. He also served the community on many boards and committees, with a particular interest in cultural and linguistic diversity, the arts and education. His Excellency was sworn in as Governor of South Australia in September 2014, after seven years as Lieutenant Governor. His hopes for a better life in Australia have benefited not just the Le family but many other people in our state and beyond.

In the last twenty years people of other nationalities have come to Australia, also hoping for improved possibilities. Some have come from horrific situations in their homelands, whilst others have simply moved countries. Whatever the background reason is for coming, all seek a happy settled successful future for themselves and their families. The next few years will see Australia become increasingly multicultural as we reap the benefits of these determined and hopeful people.

As we continue to celebrate Christmas and the coming of Christ into the world it is good for us to remember that through Christ we always have hope. This is because He came to save us, that He continues to watch over us and is our companion in both good times and bad. It is because of His suffering that He can identify with our difficult times and can help us to find ways through them and be hopeful of better times to come. Things might not always turn out the way that we imagine but He will guide us along the correct path if we let him.

When Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled from Herod's soldiers more than 2000 years ago, they would have been hopeful that they would make it safely to Egypt, and that they would be able to stay there undetected and out of harm's way. Their transient lifestyle would have made it impossible to make any long-term plans, but they trusted God and his angel messengers to guide them and keep them safe during their travels and to return them home when the time was right. We should be thankful of Joseph and Mary's trust in God as they avoided Herod's violent plans, keeping Jesus safe, so that we can have faith and hope for our futures, whatever they may be and wherever they may lead us.

Amen.