



Christmas 2020: God is with us

Standing firm in faith

Nicholas Hanrahan

The account of the flight into Egypt, which is read to us on the feast of the Holy Innocents on 28 December, is one that rings all too true with the refugee friends that are accompanied by the Jesuit Refugee Service UK. The way in which so many of them witness to God's presence alongside them in their journeys makes that presence real for those with whom they share their stories, including JRS's Nicholas Hanrahan.

Among the feasts we observe in the days following our celebrations of the birth of Christ is that of the Holy Innocents. In the gospel reading from Matthew, we hear the message of an angel who speaks to Joseph in a dream and warns him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the newborn Jesus in order to escape King Herod. The passage that follows their escape is one that describes the immense brutality of the murder of innocent children on the king's orders.

Perhaps we are tempted in the midst of our usual festivities to see this passage as something that speaks to a different age, an example of the violence of the ancient world, far removed from our lives. However, we only have to take the briefest look at the world around us to see many examples of war, violence and persecution, of people whose pursuit of and attempts to hold onto power see them do whatever they see necessary to secure their position whatever the human cost. It can be hard to see God's presence in and amongst these events, just as it would have been for the people of Bethlehem.



'The Holy Family Resting - The Flight Into Egypt' by Anna Hyatt Huntington. Photo by David Shane at flickr.com (shared via Creative Commons [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)).

At the Jesuit Refugee Service UK, we meet refugee friends who have been forced to flee their homes for all manner of reasons, only to encounter an asylum system that treats them with hostility when they reach the UK and renders them destitute, often for years. We welcome people of all faiths and none, with no attempt to proselytise, but because

faith is at the heart of our organisation, that creates space for refugee friends who have faith – whatever it may be – to share it with us and with one another. This openness is key to building relationships with and between our friends, because it means that they are able to tell their stories in their entirety: many of them say that their faith and their experience of the asylum system cannot be separated.¹

One of our refugee friends, Margaret, who has been a member of our Open Writing Space (which you can read about [here](#)), would like to share her reflections on what it means to have faith and how she has felt the presence of God in her life.

Faith in God is a good thing and again needs to work towards to grow in the Lord and know more about God, according to Hebrews 11:1.

It's a good thing to have faith in God, especially in this pandemic and end time. It is only one's faith that can keep you going with all that is happening around every minute globally. No one is exempted. I can testify that it's only my faith in Jesus that has helped me so far. Hallelujah!

Faith in God has made me realise that despite all the odds and things, challenges, wars etc. going around, if you have faith in God, you shall and will not be moved.

With faith in God, you can stand firm when you're evicted from your home, job lost, application rejection, issues in marriage etc., that good thing is coming out of it. Jesus had no comfort bed to be born but in a stinking manger, and He is the Saviour of the world. Mary wasn't worried about this, for she knew she would laugh last. She held on to her faith.

Are you homeless now, or things are not working out well the way you planned in the beginning of the year, don't worry, God that sees you to this end will not disappoint you. Still keep on believing God that one day, you will laugh and be celebrated in Jesus name. (Psalm 30:5b)

Merry Christmas!

In my time at JRS, I have been moved greatly by the faith of our refugee friends. I have been blessed to witness the ways that God is moving through and with them, to talk with people about the gift of their faith, faith that has endured through circumstances I could only begin to imagine. The JRS Charter states that: 'To accompany refugees is to affirm that God is present in human history, even in its most tragic episodes'. In my experience of accompanying our refugee friends such as Margaret, it is they who have affirmed for me that God is always with us.

Nicholas Hanrahan in the Community Outreach Officer for the Jesuit Refugee Service UK.

¹ This creation of space and comfort was explored in more detail by Dr Anna Rowlands in her report, *For our welfare and not for our harm*; chapter 2.5 is the most relevant. <https://www.jrsuk.net/for-our-welfare-and-not-for-our-harm/>