

Jesus the Refugee

Introductory Prayers:

Give us Lord, that holy fire to renew us day by day;
May we have that warmth within us to proclaim your love and power.
Let my heart always think of Him.
Let my head always bow down to Him.
Let my lips always sing His praise.
Let my hands always worship Him.
Let my body always serve Him with Love. Amen

Hymn: 455 in Singing the Faith: All my faith on God is founded

All my faith on God is founded:
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance He guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
He alone calls my heart to be His own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep His wisdom passing thought;
Splendour, light and life attend Him,
beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore, from His store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads where we go.
Love doth stand at His hand;
joy doth wait on His command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done;
High above all praises praising
for the gift of His son.
Christ doth call, one and all,
ye who follow shall not fall.

Prayers of Adoration and Praise:

Loving Lord, you draw light out of darkness and coax beauty from chaos.
You spread a rainbow promise across time and space:**AMEN**

You make music and song in the sounds of creation.
You paint pictures of glory in the stars and clouds:**AMEN**

You scatter sparks of creative energy.
You penetrate madness with wisdom and truth:**AMEN**

You weave patterns of hope in the traumas of history.
You lavish your love gifts in boundless excess: **AMEN**

You grace us with peace and warm hospitality
You welcome each person regardless of race: **AMEN**

You invite us to dine at the table of plenty.
You fill us with hope, with faith and with joy: **AMEN**

You come to us, embrace us, believe in us and stay with us.
For you are our God, Redeemer and Friend.

Readings: Matthew 2:13-15

After the Wise Men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream and said “Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill Him. So get up and take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to leave.

Joseph got up, took the child and His mother, and left during the night and stayed there until Herod died. This was done to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet “I called my Son out of Egypt.”

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared and the sea had vanished. And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God’s home is with mankind! He will live with them and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”

Part of the Christmas Story

The story of Christmas has looked at the familiar parts of the story, the parts that appear in all the nativity scenes. However, can we look at the darker side of Christmas story. Just after the wise men had visited the Christ Child, they were warned not to go back to Herod but to find a different way home. Herod was angry and vowed that all the babies who were two years old or younger would be put to death – so began the slaughter of the innocents, and that was all because Herod was afraid that if the Messiah was indeed to be born in Bethlehem his life was in danger. But Joseph was warned to flee with his family to Egypt and stay there until they were told to return

(This was written just before Christmas, early in the conflict in Afghanistan when the town of Mazar-y-Sharif was being bombed and the families from the town were forced to flee. I was reminded that Jesus and His family were also refugees from a tyrant king)

“I passed a refugee family on the road today. For all their poverty they possessed a quiet dignity. They joined the others fleeing from the excesses of a mad king – travelling south to Egypt.

The girl was young and silent, carrying before her a sleeping child, his dark curls falling over a sleeping face.

Their patient, elderly donkey plodded on down the dusty road.

The man was older – care worn and worried – he murmured words of encouragement, sometimes reaching out a hand to brush the curls from the child’s face.

They were heading for Goshen in Egypt, where refugee Jews have settled over the years. But I know what they do not yet know – they will find no welcome there. No room or work for newcomers. Jews have been there for generations, settled and prosperous. They don’t welcome refugees who upset the balance.

And so the family will have to try their luck in the towns and villages along the Nile River. There they will be foreigners, strangers, sneered at and reviled. He will be the last chosen by the overseers for a day’s work. In the queue for water, she will be pushed to the back – no friendly greeting or warm smile.

Inevitably they will move south to join the other recent refugees in the settlements across the Nile. The soil is thin and parched and, if they are lucky, they will scratch a meagre living from the thin, poor land. If he has a trade, they might fare a little better but who can afford to pay for work to be done. If they cannot return home, in the end they will die young from malnutrition, exhaustion or simply lack of hope”.

I saw a refugee family today, staring out at me from my television. Blank exhaustion etched their faces. They had tramped the 300 miles from Mazar-y-Sharif where their home was being bombed. They joined the stream of humanity heading to the Pakistan border and safety.

The woman carried a young child wrapped in a shawl; its dark curls flopped over sleepy eyes. The man carried a second child whose legs were bandaged with bloody rags, testament to the mines that strewed the roads. He held the hand of a girl of about five who struggled to keep up.

But I knew what they did not yet know. The border ahead, that they had struggled so hard to reach, was closed with 20 foot gates and barbed wire. The soldiers would meet them silently, with guns. No more room for refugees. And so they would sit in makeshift camps – no water, no food, unwanted.

Our God stands with them, feels their pain, for He has been there too.

But have **we** learned nothing in 2000 years? Still the powerless ones, the defenceless ones flee from the tyranny of governments. Still we turn them away.

Meditation:

Father God,

This is such a modern story.

Little bodies, mangled, beaten, shot and starved,

The detritus of yet another war,

Yet another mad murderer;

Soldiers and freedom fighters

Just following orders,

Making excuses,

Collateral damage they call it.

*Father God,
You care for every little victim
You weep with every heart weary parent.
Lord we feel the pain too.
We are angry at our impotence,
Our inability to do something constructive,
To make a difference.*

*Why does this still happen Lord?
Why can't we live in peace?
We know the answer.
The darkness of evil pervades our world now,
As it did 2000 years ago.*

*You came as a light in this darkness
You overcame that darkness.
Help us to keep that light alive,
And shine for you and for those whose lives are torn apart.
Our small lights are so tiny.
Alone they make no difference.
Show us how to join our lights together
And blaze out into the murky corners of the world
Filling it with your light and love.
We fervently pray for your Kingdom to come
A kingdom where there is no more crying, pain and death
And help us to keep the hope alive. Amen*

Hymn: 465 in Singing the Faith. Guide me O thou great Jehovah

Guide me O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and ever more;
feed me now and ever more

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

Prayers of Confession

Forgive us, Father, that we have harboured suspicion and magnified hurts.

Yes Lord, so says my heart

Forgive us, Father that we have been blinded by prejudice, careless in our conversation, quick to anger and slow to forgive.

Yes Lord, so says my heart

Forgive us, Father, as we forgive all who have offended us.

Yes Lord, so says my heart

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Hear then the words of Grace
'Your sins are forgiven'.

Yes Lord, so says my heart. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

In the Darkness

Let your Light shine

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord, the people of Yemen, of Afghanistan, the Sudan and we bring to you the people of Ukraine. And we remember soldiers on both sides of that conflict. We bring to you the people of Syria. May those people in charge at this time seek justice and peace?

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of Justice; we bring to you those people who live in fear; for those places where governments and soldiers impose their will. At this time we pray particularly for the peoples of the Holy Land, both Palestinians and Israelis. Especially we pray for the people of Gaza and the West Bank who live in fear. May all the communities of that land find ways to live together with justice and peace? We also pray for those kept as hostages. May they be returned to their families soon?

We pray for our brothers and sisters living with persecution.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the poor and the marginalised; where there is poverty and unfairness; where people are hungry, homeless or suffering for the want of simple medicine, move in the hearts of those who have plenty so that there is a fair sharing of the earth's resources. We pray for all refugees living in terrible conditions in camps – suffering from hunger, disease and a lack of hope. May they receive mercy, compassion and practical help?

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of creation; forgive us for misusing your created world and making deserts where there had been abundance, for polluting clean air and water. We pray for the governments of the world who have met so often to discuss climate change. Give courage to those who work to save the environment. We pray for those who are suffering because of climate change – the peoples of Sub Saharan Africa who are suffering the worst drought in living memory, those suffering because of violent floods or wild fires or freak weather events

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of healing and wholeness; we bring to you those who are known to us personally who need your healing power.....

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into this world, not to condemn it but to save. Work with your people, give us courage, wisdom and power as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. Send your Holy Spirit and may your Kingdom Come.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine. Amen

Hymn: 471 in Singing the Faith. Lord I come to you

Lord I come to you,
Let my heart be changed, renewed,
Flowing from the grace
that I found in you.
And Lord, I've come to know
the weaknesses I see in me
will be stripped away
by the power of your love.

*Hold me close,
let your love surround me,
Bring me near,
draw me to your side.
And as I wait,
I'll rise up like the eagle.
And I will soar with you,
your Spirit leads me on
in the power of your love.*

Lord, unveil my eyes;
let me see you face to face,
The knowledge of your love
as you live in me.
Lord, renew my mind
as your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
by the power of your love.
Hold me close ...

Final Prayer:

Jesus, who touched the loneliness of the marginalised in society,

Come and touch our hearts today.

Jesus, who brought life and laughter to those who had lost hope,

Come and bring hope to the hopeless today.

Jesus, who met your friends in the garden and at table,

Come and meet us in the ordinary activities of life.

Jesus, who on the Emmaus Road walked unnoticed beside those who were confused and sad,

Come and walk with us when life confuses.

Jesus of the tomb, who destroyed death with life and darkness with light,

Come and destroy the darkness in our lives and light a flame within us.

Jesus, who revealed yourself to those who loved you,

Come into our lives this day and reveal your glory to us,

AMEN