

# An Exercise for Congregational Reflection on Refugee Ministry



**“When was it, Lord, that we saw you  
a stranger and welcomed you?” (Matthew 25:37)**

The accounts of the nativity in Luke and Matthew challenge us to reflect on the impact of poverty, terrorism and displacement that overshadowed Jesus’ birth, forcing the Holy Family – already far from home in Bethlehem – to flee Herod’s murderous intent, first into Egypt, then Israel, and finally, to Nazareth.

Re-visit the gospel accounts in Luke and Matthew through the lens of refugee ministry and consider how your congregation might respond if the Holy Family were refugees in today’s world, fleeing the Syrian war or gang violence in central America. Inspired by a reflection by Cecilia Pessoa, a staff member of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, this exercise invites us to imagine ourselves as:

**SHEPHERDS:** Volunteers waiting in airports to welcome refugees into a dramatically different new land; to help them bridge gaps in adjustment that might include enrolling children in schools; helping to hone job interview skills; visit detainees (if applicable).

**ANGELS:** Voices that speak for peace, advocating on behalf of the powerless, working to educate communities and congregations about refugee resettlement, seeking to inform and dispel myths.

**WISE MEN:** Gift givers, donors- of money and the gift of time, e.g., writing letters to congressional representatives and volunteering with interfaith partners involved in refugee resettlement in our communities.

“The Christmas story of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, of angels, shepherds and wise men, and of a murderous ruler seeking the refugee child born in Bethlehem, reminds us that we are people of faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love”. (Linda Hartke, Executive Director, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services)

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Consider these **NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS** for how your congregation can be a **BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS** to refugees and immigrants in the coming year with the help of LIRS:

- **ADVOCATE AND EDUCATE:** Identify a person or persons in your congregation who will keep the congregation informed about the ministry of LIRS, particularly the “Stand for Welcome” Action Alerts.
- **PLEDGE SUPPORT** through individual monthly giving and/or a congregational budgeted pledge to LIRS.
- Launch a **REFUGEE SUNDAY** in your congregation (resources available at the LIRS website).
- Volunteer in an LIRS partner agency.

**AND REMEMBER: WE ARE A SYNOD THAT PRAYS FIRST, WALKS TOGETHER AND CHANGES LIVES!**

We are a people who **PRAY FIRST...WALK TOGETHER...CHANGE LIVES!**

“Now after (the wise men) had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said ‘Go, 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 and destroy him, Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son’”....When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother . and go into Israel, for those seeking the child’s life are dead...But when he heard that Archelaus (Herod’s son) was ruling over Judea...he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: “He will be called a Nazorean” (Matthew 2: 13-15;19-23)