

Mary's Musings

Advent 6

Matthew 2:13-23

By Judy Weaver

We left in the middle of the night. We took almost nothing: just a skin of water, a few pieces of fruit and the gifts of the Magi. I had been to the market the day before, and we left all that food. We left my freshly-baked bread on the table. We left the little wooden horse our neighbor carved for Jesus and all my cooking pots and my favorite water pitcher that belonged to my mother's mother.

Joseph said it had to look like we had just gone out somewhere and would be back any minute. It might buy us time, he said, because they would wait for us there instead of coming after us, at least for a while.

We could not say good-bye to anyone. Our friends and family would just find us gone and never know why. As we left the house, Joseph swept away our footprints with a willow branch, so no-one could tell which way we went. I carried Jesus in the shawl on my back. I was terrified. But Joseph was wonderful. As we walked on, he put his arm around Jesus and me and told me not to worry. He said he knew exactly what to do. God would not have sent the dream if escape were not possible.

But, oh, how he hurried us. We walked for an eternity. That night and for many nights after that, we had only a few hours of sleep at a time. We walked and we walked and we walked. We reached Hebron the first day, and Gaza and the coast two days after that. I thought my legs would fall off. We both had blisters on our feet. Joseph was hoarse from singing to little Jesus to keep him occupied. It was

so hot and so dusty. Jesus is a toddler, and my back ached from carrying him. We were exhausted and hungry. How I longed for that food on my table back home.

We blended in with the other travelers on the road. My heart pounded every time soldiers passed by. Once, a group of soldiers on horses began pulling out young families. We were sure they were looking for us. Joseph hurried us to the other side of a large caravan of camels. I walked with my head practically pressed into a camel's smelly flank. Our terror gave way to wonder as the merchants from the caravan slowed their pace and quietly grouped around us as they walked, hiding us from view until the soldiers were gone. They didn't even know us. They were the first of many people who showed us kindness on our journey.

We took the Roman coastal road south, relieved to be leaving Herod's territory. We were still on the road when we heard the news of the massacre back home. I cried for days as I walked. I thought of my little nephews, and my friend Rachel, weeping for her children. I have never felt so homesick and now home as I knew it was gone.

It took us a couple of weeks to reach Egypt. We stopped a couple of times in towns for Joseph to work in exchange for food. We crossed into Egypt without official permission, of course, and arrived in the border city of Pelusium after dark. I was so excited when I woke up the next morning, to see what the famous Egyptians were really like. On the road, I often thought of the stories of my ancestors fleeing Egypt. How strange that the Lord has brought us back here. We will disappear into one of the large Jewish communities here. I miss my family and the sights, smells and sounds of home. I hope someday it will be safe to go back.