

New Roots Review

December 2022

Jesus was a Refugee. "Merry Christmas.?" Yes!

by Fred Wilgenburg

Merry Christmas, Jesus was a refugee! That doesn't seem festive, does it. But, I hope it's helpful, and ultimately brings each of us peace and happiness.

From the beginning of his life, Jesus had to be on the run. Before he was two years old, he had the highest authorities—like King Herod—seeking to kill him. His parents quickly left with him to Egypt. Hearing that things were better, they planned to go back to Israel, but not trusting the new leader—Herod's son, they redirected to Nazareth in Galilee. "Merry Christmas," knowing that Jesus can relate when we have felt harassed, and unwelcomed. That may be literal for those who are, or were, refugees, or who have sought asylum from danger. Some of us have felt harassed, troubled, and unwelcomed in other ways. Not only does he care about us, but Jesus can relate to our hardships.

Jesus experienced being without a secure place—a home, and being without food. As people considered becoming his disciples, he told them that it may include having "no place to lay (your) head." As well, Jesus once went without food for forty days. "Merry Christmas," knowing that Jesus can relate when we go without. From what I hear from former refugees and asylum seekers, going without a secure place and without food is the norm during their journey of seeking safety. Many of us have not literally gone without food, rest, or safety for uncertain lengths of time, but we have felt insecure, and a longing for change, which doesn't come. Praying shortly before his arrest, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done," and feeling a distress which made him "sweat what was like drops of blood," Jesus not only loves us, but he can relate when we feel overwhelmed with anxiety for what may be next.

Besides King Herod, others tried to kill Jesus, even seeking to throw him off of a cliff. Finally, he was killed—crucified on the cross. "Merry Christmas," knowing that Jesus can relate when we experience ruthlessness and terror. A refugee is someone who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or a natural disaster. If they don't, it's probable that they will face death. For asylum seekers, it's often a similar situation, causing some to go on dangerous, sometimes deadly, journeys at sea or with smugglers. Others of us have not had near-death experiences, but we have had extreme stress. Jesus, the Savior who felt the world on his shoulders, knows our pains, and can help us.

Jesus grieved. When his friend Lazarus died, and he saw the sadness of Lazarus' sisters, Jesus wept. As Jesus was killed, we can imagine that the Holy Spirit and the Father, who once said, "This is my Son, with whom I am well-pleased," and who received the personal prayers of the Son, Jesus (John 17), felt pain as they saw their will carried out upon the Son, for the salvation of people. "Merry Christmas," knowing that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—can relate when we are sad and feeling down.

I hope the consideration that Jesus Christ was a refugee blesses you this Christmas season, as he offers freedom from bondage, a beacon of light within darkness, and as he is a relational Savior. Continuing on the themes of refugees and suffering, may we also experience a "merry Christmas" from the fulfillment that comes from joining God in making life better for others.

Many Ukrainians are feeling cold this season. Their power grid is only functioning at low levels due —>—>



**NEW ROOTS
MINISTRY**



The snow and lights can even make the entrance to a massive meat factory seem pretty. For the past 14 years, we have offered chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods.



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Christmas season to join God in bringing help there. If you want to know more about that cause, please let me know.

There are Afghans, Pakistanis, and others, many who have also suffered terribly in recent years, but whom we don't hear much about, at least not anymore. For Afghans and Pakistanis, this is largely an issue of what the US media networks consider as important news stories which affect our country. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan during the summer of 2021, and the need for our military to get people out before leaving, was a big story. The crisis is still massive as the economy of Afghanistan is terrible, females are largely not allowed to receive education or have jobs, and many are trapped there with seemingly no escape and no future, but Afghanistan no longer captures our attention. If you want to know of ways to help the suffering in Afghanistan, or to meet Afghans who were able to come to the US, but who still have family there, and who may know ways to better help those left behind, please let me know. We know several of them in Sioux Falls, especially as they are students of our Driver Training Program for new Americans. To be blessed by becoming acquainted with them this Christmas season, or beyond, just let me know.

Pakistan experienced massive floods this year which affected over 10% of the land area. Over 1700 people died, hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed, and 10 million children are still in need of life-saving support. While BBC News covered it well at the time, it was hardly discussed in US media outlets. If you want to know more about that cause, check out UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) online. As well, as I visit with a Pakistani pastor on Skype who is there seeking to bring relief and the Gospel to the suffering, if you want to meet him, please let me know.

We're just scratching the surface here, not able to give ink to describe the suffering of Haitians, Somalis, and Yemins, and countless others who feel stuck in seemingly hopeless situations. Thankfully, God knows each person by name, He knows their dire situations, and He hears every one of our prayers.

Have a merry Christmas, full of fulfillment as you pray, give, and join God in bringing peace and restoration, and as you know Him who cares so much about you! **Jesus was a Refugee. "Merry Christmas.?" Yes!**

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to Russia's war against them. As much of Ukraine has a winter similar to the Midwest, that is a bad predicament. The lack of electricity is stacked onto destroyed cities, and the death of many.

I'm thankful to know Pastor Victor Pugach and his House of God Church in Sioux Falls. It is a large church, mostly with people originally of Ukraine, and some who are originally of Russia and other Slavik countries. As they have a well-established network with churches in western Ukraine which are receiving refugees as well as directing support in Ukraine where it is most vital, it has been good this

What is New Roots Ministry?

It's "a springboard for new Americans & their churches." This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, and through driver training for new Americans.



Ed Young of Global Recordings Network camped in SF for 5 weeks, using his camper and my office as recording studios. We found people who Ed could record as they spoke Gospel scripts, including "Jesus the Refugee," in their first languages. These scripts are then widely distributed.