

**Reflection on the Gospel-Feast of the Holy Family Year A
(Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Dreaming is an important part of life, both the dreaming we do at night and the “day dreaming” we engage in as we look to the future. In today’s gospel story, Joseph is a dreamer who listens to his dreams and hears the voice of God directing him to go where he may not have chosen to go. The visit of the wise ones or astrologers from the east has left him with some questions. Now the pieces begin to fall into place. In his dream, he becomes aware of the danger that is threatening the family. The new born child is at risk. Steps must be taken to protect the child and his mother.

The desert road to Egypt had long been the place of refuge for Joseph’s ancestors. It is still a place of refuge and asylum, away from the centre of international affairs. Although the gospel presents a patriarchal image of family with the husband as head of the household, there is no sense that family leadership resides in the exercise of power over others. It resides rather in constant vigilance and in care and protection of the most vulnerable. The reader of the gospel has already been told that Joseph is “just”: he has acted with integrity and will continue to do so.

The story-teller uses a literary device, that of “formula-citation”, to locate the story of this special family within Israel’s bigger faith story. Centuries before, Israel (Jacob’s family) had fled into Egypt in time of famine. Their descendants were later rescued from slavery in Egypt. This new-born child will also go down into Egypt for protection and be led out to safety through God’s providence. There is no neat correspondence of character to character or event to event, simply allusions to the power of God at work in the great saving events in the lives of God’s people. The reader is being prepared for the momentous destiny in store for the world through the agency of a child at risk.

The child’s mother receives little attention in the telling of this story. We may like to retell the story through the lens of her fears and hopes or through the lens of the fears and hopes of the millions of refugees and asylum seekers of our time. God is just as much at work in the lives of those who are threatened now as was the case in the life of the family we name as “holy”. God worked through the agency of Mary and Joseph and other wisdom figures to protect the child. God works in our times through those who imagine or dream of a different future for the homeless and bereft and act to achieve those dreams. As we move into a new year, we need to ensure we are among them. And let’s not forget the other-than-human families at risk on our planet.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 Now after they had left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, 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, to 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 through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." When Herod died, an angel suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, 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."