

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas. Last week we had a wonderful Christmas Potluck and a good Christmas Eve service with some visitors from our neighborhood. It was wonderful that our Christmas celebration was not just for us alone but with our neighbors in the community. I want to say thank you to all of you who worked hard for those special events.

On Christmas Day, my family and I went to Lake Tahoe. It was a wonderful getaway for a couple of days. It was cold up there; but it was very nice to feel the cold. The kids had fun sledding even though there was lots of falling on the icy ground. And it was also fun to watch them.

On the first two days we did not have snowfall except for little sprinkles. But when we were returning home on Friday, snow started falling. We had a difficult time on the road, but the trip was fun; with snow and the trees we really had a White Christmas.

Once again, it was a beautiful Christmas. While we were up there, we did not have any access to the news; no phones, no papers, no TVs, and no internet. We just focused on ourselves and tried to keep us in the nice Christmas spirit.

But at one point we heard this terrible news about the assassination of Prime Minister Bhutto in Pakistan. Personally I do not have any connection to that part of the world but I was very disturbed by the tragedy. For some reason, she was felt like someone I knew. I thought about the frustration of the Pakistani people; I worried about the nation's future. It was just awful news.

Once again, I realize that this is the reality of the world we live in. When we read the scripture lesson this morning, the reality of the first Christmas was very similar. When the baby Jesus was born, the world waiting for him was not like what we see on Christmas cards. It was not like a worry-free world.

As soon as the day of first Christmas was over, today's text says, the first news the holy family hears in the middle of night is "Get up and leave the country!" King Herod was in search of the baby to kill.

So it shouldn't be new for us to hear bad news while we still try to enjoy the Christmas spirit.

When I went to Egypt two months ago, the church leaders always talked about

the historical fact that Egypt was where Jesus and his family lived there for a while. They were very proud of this connection. The place where Jesus' family lived has been one of the holy places where hundreds of thousands of people come and visit.

But they never talked about what the holy family may have gone through while they were there. Jesus' family was not on vacation there; they were there because the life of baby Jesus was in danger; Jesus' life was wanted back home in Palestine.

I am not sure if the holy family really felt secure there in Egypt; some of the people in Egypt probably knew why this Jewish family was there too. And they may have had to hide themselves from people's attention. So living in Egypt may not have been easy for Jesus' family there either!

Having gone through it himself, Jesus knows what challenges the people of God go through in their own lives. He knows what it is like being a refugee; he knows what it is like being hungry; he knows what it is like being homeless. He knows what it is like living in the life-threatening world. He knows what it is like even being on the run.

He's been there.

But that is not all, Jesus, Immanuel, the-God-With-Us, cares about those who have all these challenges.

When I was there, they said, there had been a Jewish community in Egypt even before Jesus' family arrived there. Who knows? Some of them were the descendants of those Jewish people who chose not to follow Moses when he was taking his people out of Egypt. Some of them had chosen to come back there later to live. Egypt was always a better place in terms of what to eat and what to wear compared to the Palestine.

In the Bible, however, the main image of Egypt is portrayed as slavery and death. We know Egypt is where people of God found food and security when their lives were challenged; nonetheless God never wanted them to live there for long. It was not a promised land; it was not the place they were supposed to long for.

But people make wrong choices. People follow what their bodies want without knowing that what they are doing is displeasing God.

You and I have been there.

Jesus even knows about this. We say we want to live in faith; we say we want to be faithful to God; we say our priority is God. But as soon as we get out of the church door, we look for lives in Egypt; we want to take a refuge in things, not in God's words; we worry about what to eat, what to wear, and where to sleep. We worry and try to find security in other things than in God.

Jesus is not just the stained-glass Jesus. What I mean is that Jesus is not trapped in the church building. Jesus not only hears us during this worship, but He is also with us in our daily lives outside the church walls.

Jesus has come to us in human form- who knows what it is like being a human being. "He is a blood and flesh—someone who had a mom, a dad, and a home. He had both friends and enemies. He got angry, thirsty, and tired. He went to parties, he went fishing, and he told stories. And he became like us 'in every respect'—struggling, suffering, wondering, and even dying." (Emphasis, Vol. 37, p.78)

He knows our pains, our limitations, and our shortcomings. He knows our needs. He feels and he cries. God in Jesus knows where we have been and where we are. Sometimes it is hard for us to realize that especially we face hard challenges.

But God wants us to see beyond. God wants us to see who will win eventually. Jesus wants us to succeed. Not only that, he wants to help us.

The world is dark and seems to be getting darker. While we are still enjoying the spirit of Christmas, the bangs of bombings never stop and seem to sound louder. Politicians always make promises but things seem to get worse.

The injustice and evil power seem to win throughout the world; they threaten us in every corner of our lives; it seems that God is taking a nap while all the evil ones are active.

But today's scripture clearly tells us that it is not the case.

It is not the helpless baby Jesus and his family but the king Herod who dies at the end of the story. The king with the sword, the man with all the power, is dead while the chosen family is alive and come back into the scene.

We need to see the big picture.

God wins.

God's promise prevails.

God's plan wins.

People of God win.

People of faith win.

God is working day and night. Because of that, you and I can give our problems to God and rest at nights.

You and I can have hope; and you and I can rest in Him.

God not only wins but helps us to win in our lives.

Amen.