

**CHRISTMAS 2C 2025**  
**Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church**  
**Wilmington, Delaware**  
**January 5, 2025**

It seems a bit confusing to hear today's Gospel lesson on this, the last day of the Christmas Season, otherwise known as "twelve drummers drumming day." Tomorrow is the Feast of the Epiphany, when we read Matthew's account of the magi following the star and offering gifts to the Christ child. But today, we hear about them leaving, and what's known as the flight into Egypt.

A rather gruesome part of the story is omitted. It would have been read on December 28, Holy Innocents Day. Herod is angry that he's been thwarted by the wise men, so he orders all boys under two years of age to be killed, just to cover his bases and satisfy his paranoia. One aspect of that story is that it occurs in Ramah, and we're told a mother, Rachel, cries for her lost children. Mothers in Ramah, not far from Bethlehem and also in the West Bank area, continue to do that today due to the actions of a few Herod-like rulers. And while there's no documentation of Herod's actions outside of Matthew's story, there's plenty of it about actions taken—or not taken—in our own time.

Unlike Luke, Matthew doesn't seem to be all that interested in the birth story of Jesus. Yes, our editing of the story for our pageants and carol services includes both. But Matthew has another purpose in mind. He's writing to people of Jewish ancestry and faith, a few decades after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Matthew wants to convince his readers that their tradition, their faith, continues in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, even as it takes on new meaning.

Jesus is a type of Moses, and even the embodiment of Israel, in Matthew's telling. He is exiled to Egypt, and then returns home. He gives his initial teaching on a hillside, with the Beatitudes coming as a type of commandment given by this new law-giver. But there's no intermediary now as was necessary with Moses. This teaching comes straight from the one giving it, not through a leader who isn't even allowed to stand face-to-face with God. In Jesus of Nazareth, God now has a face we can gaze upon and not only live, but find life beyond our most hope-filled dreams in our seeing of its truth.

This Jesus whom we gather to praise will offer much. In return, he asks only one thing from us: our lives, given in grateful discipleship as we are led from slavery to sin and its consequential spiritual death into sharing the eternal life that comes from God.

It's not only Moses who can be recognized in the life of Jesus. Jeremiah's prophecy begins to be fulfilled in this child growing up in Nazareth. The words of today's Psalm take on new meaning as we begin to understand that God's dwelling is not a building designed and built by human hands, but a person created in God's image

whose very life reveals the purpose and ongoing creative activity of God. And that's not limited just to Jesus. It includes all who claim faith in who he is.

We who are baptized into the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth are invited to live in his resurrection—not at some time to come, but here and now, after we are led from our own exile of false idolatry into new life in the living Christ. We, together, and not individually, are the place where God lives, each of us perhaps like a room with its own purpose and ability to sustain and share life, each decorated with gifts and graces, as our Methodist siblings say, that show aspects of faith that are too numerous for one of us to reveal by ourselves.

And, like those wise men in the part of the story you might have thought you'd hear today, we have our own gold, frankincense, and, yes, myrrh to offer. We have an abundance of riches to give when needed. We have prayers and praises wafting into the ether, their aroma rising to God as we offer them. And, we have our troubles and sorrows to offer as well, seeking not just healing, but a sign of life beyond their present ills. We call that "hope."

We can see all those things in ourselves and in others, here and beyond these walls. Or we can remain in exile, a captive in all kinds of Egypts available to us, and deny God's goodness and mercy made known in the very human, very divine life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Maybe those twelve drummers will get our attention, and lead us onward in the parade of the forgiven and redeemed. And may we reach out and help others join in the celebration of life offered to us as we offer it back in praise and gratitude. Our continuing life together is the story of how we make that happen. Just be sure to follow the true star.