

December 15<sup>th</sup>

Matthew 1:18-25

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Several years ago my wife Barb and I took a wonderful tour of Jordan and Egypt with friends. There were a number of religious sites on the itinerary. In Jordan we visited Bethany beyond the Jordan, site in Matthew 3: 13-17 of John's baptism of Jesus, marking the beginning of His ministry. We explored Mt. Nebo, where in Deuteronomy 34: 1-4 God grants Moses his wish to see the 'promised land' before his death nearby. Views over the Jordan River Valley today -- 'the land of milk and honey' -- are of total desert and scrub vegetation. Farther up the Valley the land is very productive but accompanied most years when the polluted Jordan is a trickle reaching the Dead Sea, barely a drop leaving it. On our way to Petra, we visited St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Madaba to see the striking mosaic floor depicting the oldest map of Palestine and the Holy Land in existence. In Cairo, an early stop was a Coptic Christian Church built on one of many purported Holy Family places-of-rest. Matthew 2: 1-13 tells the familiar Christmas Story of Wise Men from the east following the Star of Bethlehem to Jesus' birthplace, bearing gifts for the new King of the Jews. While paying homage to King Herod, he asked them to report back when they found the Baby. They did not, instead warning Joseph of Herod's slaughter of infants plot, repeated by an angel through a dream. The Family immediately took flight into Egypt, lasting nearly four years, Matthew 2:13-23.

What has changed since Jesus' birth? Almost everything, climate change being one of the most serious. From desertification to mega-storms to melting glaciers, fires and floods. From heatwaves to mass migrations, species destruction, rising oceans, pollution and environmental injustice. Humankind has led the escalation of all these changes to God's Creation. What hasn't changed? The resilience of our faith in Jesus Christ, the worldwide Christian Church, and celebration of Jesus' birth.



*Wise Men*, by Lucinda Naylor, linocut print, 1997, The Westminster Collection

Prayer: Lord of us all, In this season of creation and giving, grant us strength and wisdom to boldly take action on climate change in our churches, homes and locales and as citizens of Mother Earth, applying the Universal Golden Rule to all. Amen.



*The Flight Into Egypt*, by Joan Bohlig, etching, 1975, The Westminster Collection