

## **Jesus was an immigrant**

### **What in the hell are we doing to immigrants, in his name?**

**By Jacqueline Lewis    January 26, 2026    ProgressiveChristianity.com**

We took our tree down, meaning John did while I was traveling. I really don't like taking down the tree. When I was young and single, I'd get a live tree, water it with care, and keep it up until Valentine's Day! It makes me sad to take the tree down, like it makes me sad to plant annuals, enjoy their beauty, then watch them die.

What keeps me company in this take-tree-down moment is the ways the lessons from Christmas keep shining in our souls; the holiness of the experience is stretched out into the story of the Three Wisemen who come to find the baby king Jesus, and the ways the insight of God's glorious revelation shines upon them. We see God manifested in a scandalous birth; in revelations to shepherds and wisemen alike; in songs sung by choirs of angels; in thoughts held close to a mother's breast.

We see God's intention manifested in the way God chose to come to a particular community of outsiders to show them the power of love made flesh. And we see God's intention manifested in the way an angel in a dream coaxes a father to take his family from Judea to Egypt to avoid violence and death. There is something revealed in that about how God cares for the vulnerable, about how God's urging to love the immigrant comes from the very heart of God who loved the immigrant Jesus enough to protect him while he was across borders and to bring him home.

Have you heard or read this story of the immigrant Jesus? Matthew's gospel tells it. It's why we sing We Three Kings of Orient Are. Here is a concise version from the scripture, the NRSVUE version. See the bold parts if you are in a hurry.

#### **The Visit of the Magi**

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east[b] and have come to pay him homage." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[c] was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd[d] my people Israel.' "

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." 9 When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had

stopped,[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **The Escape to Egypt**

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord 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.” 14 Then Joseph[h] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

### **The Massacre of the Infants**

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,[i] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.[j] 17 Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

### **The Return from Egypt**

19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 20 “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.” 21 Then Joseph[k] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling 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. 23 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 Nazarene.”[l]

We have a thing called Christian because Mary and Joseph took their little boy to Egypt and were welcomed there. Yes there as a country/region/place called Egypt and Jesus was not Egyptian. He was a stranger in a strange land. An alien, a refugee, an outsider.

Jesus’ people had scripture, Torah, about how to treat immigrants:

Leviticus 19:34

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God

Exodus 23:9

“You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:19

Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Zechariah 7:10 ESV / 133 helpful votes

Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

Then there are the Christian scriptures:

Matthew 25:35

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

Hebrews 13:2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Family, ICE is waging a war on humanity, a war instigated by this administration. You read the scripture that belongs to Jews and Christians (we share a book). Do you see anything here that justifies the snatching of bodies, the kidnapping of children, the Gestapo-like practices. We can say NO. In the name of the Afro-Asiatic, Judean/Palestinian refugee baby. Say NO.

### **About the Author**

Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis, PhD is the Senior Minister of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. She is a nationally acclaimed activist, author, public theologian, and organizer of an anti-racist multicultural movement of love and justice. She has been featured in The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and on The Today Show, CBS, and MSNBC. She wrote The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multiracial and Multicultural Communities, and also wrote a book with her husband John called The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation.