

---

# From the Pastor's Desk

**Pastor Jerry Morris**

DECEMBER 2015

---

## An Uncomfortable Reflection

We enter the season of Advent and Christmas, where we remember the story of Christ's birth. A comfortable story. It is comfortable in its familiarity. We know all the songs that we sing in the church – well, the first stanzas, anyway – and we know the scriptures better than any others. *And in the same country, there were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night . . .* We know the sights and smells of Christmas by heart: the decorations that feel more joyous than any others, the smells of baking and hot cider and pine needles. It is a comfortable time, because it is so familiar.

Of course there's a down side when something becomes so comfortably familiar. We can hold so tightly to that familiarity that it becomes a tyrant. Try suggesting to a child, "Let's do Christmas differently this year!" and see how well that's received. We do *not* usually deal well with variations in our Christmas routine. We want the same traditional foods and desserts – even if we don't actually like these foods enough to make them any other time of the year. People who can't stand flying, nevertheless shoulder their way through O'Hare Airport (where their flight's been delayed two hours because of a storm in Denver), because they *always* go home on Christmas. But evidently it's worth it, to keep the comfortable traditions alive.

There's an irony in how comfortable we are with our Christmas patterns, though. The event we celebrate was neither familiar nor comfortable to any of the original participants. Where we go "home for the holidays," Joseph and Mary left home. To those new parents in a strange town who couldn't even find a room and had to settle for a roof, it was frighteningly unfamiliar and certainly more uncomfortable than our softly-lit,

---

warm-looking manger scenes would imply. The smells they encountered may have been familiar, but were not as appetizing as the ones we associate with the season.

Worst of all, some time after Jesus was born, the family had to leave again. Their land was ruled by a demented megalomaniac named Herod who would do anything to protect his throne, including mass murder, and when this madman heard about a “new king” born in Bethlehem, he sent his soldiers to slaughter all the baby boys there. So Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with their child. Nothing reassuring or familiar or comfortable about that story.

In fact – you may have noticed this already – the story of Jesus’ birth that bears no resemblance at all to our celebration of it, looks an awful lot like the lives of millions of refugees this year from Syria. They, too, are fleeing a mad dictator who thinks nothing of killing his own people to maintain his hold on power. They, too, live in fear and uncertainty. And I think it’s fair to assume that, like Joseph and Mary, they would never have endangered their fragile children by fleeing to a foreign country unless the danger of staying was far greater.

*Lord, this year let us not be too comfortable. As you came to comfort us, give us the grace to comfort others. Amen.*