

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

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## JUSTICE ISSUE: IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Matthew 2:13-23
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	¶¶The Political Community, Basic Rights and Freedoms, G. Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees
OBJECTIVE:	To teach students about the plight of refugees in light of the story of Jesus in Egypt.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	Computer, internet, TV/projector and screen, map, pen and paper, Bible

### LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

##### Breath Practice (1 min)

Invite the group to sit in a circle or relaxed posture.

Say the following slowly: “We gather today in a sacred space. We bring our whole selves—our joy, our confusion, our questions, our hope.”

Guide the group through 3 deep breaths:

- Inhale: “Breathe in peace.”
- Exhale: “Breathe out fear.”

*(Repeat 3 times aloud, then quietly allow them to breathe on their own.)*

##### Word Check-In (3–4 min)

Then, invite each person to share a one-word check-in:

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“Name one word that describes how you are arriving today. No explanations needed—just a word.”

*(Go around the circle or popcorn-style.)*

## SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

### Opening questions:

- What do you know about the nativity (Christmas) story immediately following the birth of Jesus?
- Are you familiar with King Herod? What do you know about him?

Read Matthew 2:13-23 (NRSVUE). You can have a volunteer read the entire passage or take turns reading verses.

**Say:** We just read about Herod the Great. Here is a little background on him. Herod the Great was the Roman-appointed king of Judea. He’s a major figure in Matthew 2, where he hears about the birth of Jesus from the visiting Magi (wise men). Herod isn’t excited—he’s terrified because he sees this newborn “king of the Jews” as a threat to his power.

Herod was known historically for being extremely paranoid and brutally violent. He executed members of his own family, including his wife and sons, because he feared they might try to take his throne. So, when he hears about a possible new “king,” his instinct is to eliminate the threat—no matter how young.

In Matthew 2:16–18, Herod orders the killing of all male children under two in and around Bethlehem.

### Discussion Questions:

- What feelings come up reading about the Holy Family fleeing?
- Why do you think Matthew included this story?
- Who has the power in this passage? Who doesn’t?

## NOTES

### Context of the Gospel of Matthew:

The Gospel of Matthew was likely written between 80–90 CE, during a time of great upheaval for Jewish communities. The Second Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and many Jews were scattered, disoriented, and grappling with the loss of central religious identity. Matthew’s audience appears to be a community of Jewish Christians—followers of Jesus who still identified deeply with Jewish traditions but were also navigating tensions with both the broader Jewish community and the expanding Gentile Christian movement.

### “Who was King Herod?” additional information:

This horrifying event is sometimes called the “Slaughter of the Innocents.” While historians debate whether this specific event happened as described, it fits perfectly with what we do know about Herod’s character: he was obsessed with control, power, and protecting his legacy—no matter the cost.

By including this harrowing story, Matthew isn’t just offering a historical account; he’s telling his audience something deeply theological: God enters into our most broken realities. Jesus does not come into the world protected and powerful, but vulnerable and hunted. For a community wrestling with marginalization and danger, this would have been a powerful affirmation that God is with them—in exile, in grief, and in hope.

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- Where do we see systems of fear, control, or violence in the world today?
- Have you or someone you know ever had to leave a home or community? What was that like?

## GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Watch a video on what it means to be a refugee. Suggested videos are listed in the notes/resources to the facilitator section.

**ACTIVITY:** On your own, write down your definition of a refugee. Think: how might this be different from an immigrant? Then, with a partner, share your answers.

Post group work questions:

What common themes came up? Can you group come up with a definition?

**Say:** According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): Refugees are people who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and have sought safety in another country.

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country.”

(<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees>)

**Ask:** Can you name the 5 countries from where people are coming as refugees?

**Say:** The top five origin countries—Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Venezuela—account for nearly three-quarters of all refugees.

## NOTES

Choose one suggested videos, or find your own, to share a synopsis of what it means to be a refugee:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgyqLIE9Ss>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVofjg1Whul>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2dXLfVtWdw&list=RDL2dX-LfVtWdw&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2dXLfVtWdw&list=RDL2dX-LfVtWdw&start_radio=1)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBQ-loHfimQ>

### Additional Resources:

Statistics: [https://admin.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://admin.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

### Countries with Highest Refugees:

#### *Sudan*

The civil war in Sudan has triggered the largest displacement crisis in Africa and one of the largest globally. By end 2024, about 4.1 million people had fled the country, with 16 million internally displaced, the biggest internal displacement ever recorded. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudanese\\_refugee\\_crisis\\_%282023%E2%80%93present%29?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudanese_refugee_crisis_%282023%E2%80%93present%29?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

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## Discussion Questions:

- Can you locate these countries on a map? What are some of the other surrounding countries—do you think they are receiving an influx of refugees from these countries, as well?
- What do you know about the political, economic, and climate situations in these countries? Why are people fleeing?

**WATCH:** “German Churches Welcome Migrants” by United Methodist Videos

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VCueY\\_pFy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VCueY_pFy4)

Read the United Methodist’s Social Principles: The Political Community (Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees) as a group.

## Discussion Questions:

- How does our denomination speak about immigration?
- How do our actions align with our values?
- What can our local church do to reach out to refugees in our town or community?

## NOTES

### *Syria*

After more than a decade of conflict, around 6.1 million Syrians remain refugees abroad, plus 7.4 million internally displaced. (<https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends>)

### *Afghanistan*

Long-term instability and ongoing crises have forced roughly 10<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> million Afghans to flee—internally and internationally—with 6–6.1 million registered as refugees.

### *Ukraine*

The 2022 Russian invasion sparked Europe’s largest refugee crisis since WWII: over 5 million Ukrainians remain abroad, with nearly 9 million displaced overall. (<https://apnews.com/article/unhcr-italy-ukraine-russia-displaced-war-support-619fa16039a2bd59ddb200f7e3b048e5>)

### *Venezuela*

Political and economic collapse has driven an exodus of about 7.7 million Venezuelans, making it Latin America’s biggest displacement crisis UNHCR.

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## CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Invite each student to share one practical action they can participate in to support those seeking refuge in the United States.

### Action Challenge (students choose one):

- Write a letter to your local, state national or representatives about refugee protections and immigration reform.
- Sponsor a refugee family, volunteer, or support an immigrant or refugee ministry:
- Teach your local congregation about the United Methodist social principles, then make a “refugees welcome” poster for your church yard or window.

Close in prayer. One suggested prayer could be:

“God of justice and peace, show us where we can be a shelter, a helper, a voice. Amen.”

## NOTES

Find a list of your elected officials here:

<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>

### List of immigrant and/or refugee ministries:

United Methodist Affiliated:

- United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)
- The Immigration Law & Justice Network
- Just Neighbors
- Lydia Patterson Institute

Others Faith-Based Organizations:

- Global Refuge
- Church World Service
- Catholic Charities
- World Relief