

Here we are—a week removed from Christmas Day—the first day of a new year. In the week now past, we have experienced moments of joy and peace. In that same week you have probably experienced moments of great challenge, and maybe even danger. The Silent Night of Christmas never lasts as long as we want before reality intrudes, and once again we’re scrambling. Things don’t go as planned. As you travel toward your heavenly home, sometimes you are forced down a road you never would have chosen. Instead of the straight and easy road we prefer, we find ourselves going home another way, and it’s a way that involves pain. So also, the Christ Child, Mary, and Joseph were forced to go home another way.

Suffering is often seen only as a sign of God’s angry judgment. Suffering Christians may question God’s goodness in their anger. Their faith may be weakened by this experience. The Gospel reminds us that suffering is part of the Christian life just as it was for the sinless Christ Child. Suffering can even be a blessing in disguise, a sign of unity with Christ. God sent the Holy Family home another way not to punish them, but to help and protect them. God sends us home another way for the same reason.

The infant Jesus went home another way because of evil. The Holy Family’s trip home was detoured because of King Herod’s murderous plan. Instead of straight home from Bethlehem north to Nazareth, they were directed south to Egypt. To protect His Son, God sent them home another way. Herod was motivated by paranoid jealousy. Ultimately, this was Satan’s first battle in the war to destroy Jesus. The devil hoped to snuff out the Savior quickly, while still a helpless child. This Egyptian detour lasted for one or two years. And when Herod died, the family was detoured once again because of Herod’s son. Verse 22 suggests that Joseph and Mary wanted to settle in or at least pass through Judea but could not. So many complications.

However, we can also say that the Christ Child and family went home another way because of God’s loving will. How could Jesus’ Heavenly Father allow such mistreatment of his Son? Why did the Father send the family fleeing to Egypt when he could have brought Herod and his plans to nothing? The answer involves the mystery of Jesus’ humiliation. It was the Father’s will that Jesus take our place in every way. We often think of His Passion and Suffering as something Jesus did as an adult, but it began much earlier. Jesus takes our place in humiliation and punishment—what we deserved becomes His burden to bear. And though not it was not according to their own planned route or schedule, the Holy Family did get home by God’s plan of grace. Life in Nazareth did finally begin.

We who believe in Jesus also are on our way home, not to Nazareth, but to the heavenly life Jesus has prepared for us. We’d prefer the smoothest, most direct way. But just as Jesus went home another way that was much more difficult, we may be called to follow in His steps.

Like Jesus and the Holy Family, we are going home another way because of evil. If only our way home to heaven were level and smooth. If only Christian faith with honesty and hard work always resulted in success and happiness. We can tolerate a few minor detours, but we

don't want to see a sign that says "Road Closed." We're not looking for sudden illness, loss, pain or suffering. Instead of victorious cruising we find ourselves fleeing for safety wherever we can find it. This is because we have the same enemy as Jesus. The same devil who hated Him hates us. The same sinful world that did not know him does not care for us. And these things combine to change our homeward route.

But also like Jesus and his family, we are going home another way because of God's loving will. God is the master of leading us home by another way through valleys and trials. This is not because He hates us or because He has not fully forgiven our sin for Jesus sake. Instead, He loves us in the same way that He loves his own Son, which means that God does not eliminate all evil that we may face, just as he did not eliminate Herod on the spot. He does warn us to flee from sin and evil. He does this through his word of law, and he continually calls us home through the word of the Gospel. Interestingly, someone had to die before the Holy Family could return home. In that case, it was King Herod. In our case, someone else had to die before we could travel home, that someone was Jesus. He did everything necessary for our salvation by his obedience in life and death and by his resurrection. And further, someone must die before I can travel home; it's me! Unless Christ returns first, I will necessarily pass through that doorway, but I can do so in faith, trusting that "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you, Lord Jesus, are with me, your rod and staff, they comfort me."

So as this new year begins, has your life taken a detour? Is it not going according to plan? Do you find yourself riding on a rough road right now? Learn from the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Such is the way of all who followed Jesus in this world. It's not usually the way of comfort and pleasure that leads us home. The Christian path involves fleeing and escaping evil; it involves hardship and sacrifice as well. When your road seems to take an unpleasant turn, do not listen to the devil's whispers that God has abandoned you. God led Jesus, Mary and Joseph home by another way to protect help and save them. He leads you home another way for reasons that one day will become perfectly clear.