

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

January 2, 2022



## FIRST

*the challenge and hope of going first*

by Drew Downs

When I was young, it was an honor to be the first one picked; whether it be for kickball or the school play.

But going first in the spelling bee or for a class presentation was nerve-racking. As was the first day of school.

Going first is a delight and a terror. Our associations with being first are a combination of both winning and losing.

To go first is rarely easy. Usually you are blazing a trail and having to overcome your own insecurities.

It also means that others will decide whether or not they follow you. Your effort (and sometimes blind fear) often makes it easier for them. And worse, sometimes *they* get the credit for doing it better.

Either way, first is where the real action is.

# CHRISTMAS

*Winter 2022*

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## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Warmest Christmas greetings! I hope you and yours are having a joyous and hope-filled Christmas season!

The day *after* Christmas Day is a special day for us. It is the Feast of Stephen. Stephen is remembered as the first deacon and martyr. And he serves us as our patron saint.

So what does it mean to follow someone who so clearly went first? Are we following someone who went first or are we being asked to be a people who go first?

I think the answer is yes.

Thinking about the congregation's character, I don't think we are naturally a "go first" people. We have teachers and medical professionals and administrators and communicators, and a whole host of other professions who make their home in our community.

What we all have in common, however, is a deep commitment to service. To serving with grace and devotion.

I don't think Stephen was "good at" going first. I think he was devoted to serving God and other people.

And maybe that is the one thing most necessary to be like him. To do what he did. To follow and lead like him. We don't have to be the most talented, we just need the heart to give it a shot. Doing what is most important *when* it is most important. Often that means we are called to do it before anyone else.

Drew

# CHRISTMAS

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## FOR CHRISTMAS

*The Second Sunday after Christmas*

January 2, 2022

### **Collect**

○ God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

"This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son.""

### **Reflection**

I love Christmas. Everything about it. The gift-giving, the music, the decorations, the good cheer. Particularly the good cheer. People act...well, like *Christ* this time of year.

And there's something about gathering on Christmas Eve night, hearing the story of Jesus's birth, that fills us with joy.

I think our ancestors understood just how magical this all is. How revolutionary that kind of *joy* can be when days are short, and spirits are low.

I also think they understood the addictive danger a hollow joy can be. A joy that isn't anchored in the challenge of living in the world.

# CHRISTMAS 2022

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From the earliest days of Christmas celebrations, they gave us the joy of Christmas and then the feasts of Stephen, John, and Holy Innocents. They also gave us the soaring beauty of John and the gritty fear of the flight into Egypt.

The Christmas story doesn't *only* contain the joy. It contains the reason we have joy in Jesus's coming into the world.

In this week's story, Joseph is warned of the king's intended murder of his son. So he takes Mary and Jesus and secretly steals them away, to be refugees in a foreign land. and while they're gone, the king commits genocide, slaughtering all the infant boys around their home.

The gruesome violence of a fearful king mixed with the holy family fleeing for safety by the grace of God is an iconic image. But not only of the Holy Family. It is also an image of the Hebrew people itself. And this reversal: of the family fleeing **to** Egypt, rather than **from** it, completes the Exodus and casts Jesus as a new Moses.

It also reminds us of where God's favor and delight resides. Not in the halls of power, through strict order, but in community, patience, hope, and love.

For us, it is easy to see Herod as a Disney Villain, grotesque and clearly sinister in his intentions. And we are obviously sympathetic to the plight of the Holy Family. But as Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles join God in reminding us that **we** are to show favor to the refugee because God showed favor to **us** when **we** were refugees.

To spell it out more plainly, we are generous to and welcoming of refugees now because our ancestors were. Being generous is not dependent on *our* being refugees *now*. It is *our* response to the generosity we were born to replicate. Especially in difficult times. And especially when others are replicating evil.

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