

This week brings us to the end of another year and a time for personal reflection. Whether we're catching up with old friends, going through receipts, or praying about new year's resolutions, this is a time to look over our lives and see just where we are. It often happens that where we are is not where we thought we were going to be. We may never have dreamed that we'd have these responsibilities, these friends, these heartaches. So we ask at the end of the year, "How did I ever get here?"

That's a question I'm sure St. Joseph wondered about when he woke up one New Year's morning in Nazareth. The story of how the Holy Family ended up there is quite a dramatic one. According to the Matthew, Mary and Joseph had made their home in Bethlehem, but after Jesus was born, an angel commanded Joseph to take the family to Egypt since Herod wanted to kill their child. This trip was not a holiday cruise down the Nile. Egypt was the place where the Israelites had been slaves; no Jew would have wanted to go back there. It would be like telling a modern Jew to go live in Auschwitz, or telling someone who was born and bred in Kansas City, Missouri that now they had to go live in Kansas City, Kansas for a while. Egypt was no picnic.

The story continues. After Herod dies, the angel tells Joseph he can leave Egypt now, but they don't go back to their home in Bethlehem. Herod was dead, but before he died he split his kingdom in two and gave half of it--the half that included Bethlehem--to his son Archelaus. Joseph was so fearful of Archelaus that he took his family to a city outside his rule. That city was Nazareth. Joseph thought they'd be safe there. The irony is that Nazareth was in the half of Herod's kingdom now ruled by his other son, Herod Antipas, who later ordered the execution of John the Baptist. Nazareth was not home to Jesus, it was a city of exile. When he finally did return home to Judea, the region of his birth, he was executed there.

So I suspect Joseph lay awake some nights in Nazareth wondering, "How did I ever get here?" This is what brought Joseph to Nazareth: love for his family, fear of the government, concern for the life of his son, and a faith in God so blind that he unquestionably followed orders he received in dreams.

This new year's when we reflect on how did I ever get here we may find that we too have a list of loves, fears, and pains which forced us to make decisions about our future. We may also find that some decisions seemed out of our control, as if they were directed by powers beyond us.

Along life's journey, God may call us to Egypt, where we don't want to go; he may call us to Nazareth, a city that isn't home; or he may call us to Judea where we expect to find the comforts of home, but where there is persecution instead.

Today we pray that God will make our families like the Holy Family. We need families which are close, families which are willing to make sacrifices. But above all, we need families willing to respond to the call of God wherever it leads them: to care for those who are sick, to give compassion to the unemployed, to challenge the abusers of alcohol and other drugs, to go to Egypt, to Nazareth, to Judea with the courage of our faith that we do not journey alone, we go at the call of God.