There’s a time after a child’s birth that doesn’t really feel like time at all. It holds no rhythm, no rhyme, no reason. Its punctuated by the child’s cries for food, comfort, a clean diaper and more likely, by a cry for who knows what because nothing is working. Night and day are but words. Exhaustion isn’t an accurate word to describe it all because it is that, yes, but bliss and wonder and pain and confusion. It is life, new and still-being-formed.

So it was for Mary and Joseph, don’t you think? And for the Christ child, too? Three figures, learning how to be in the world together - an ancient story yet new each time.

The darkness crowded in but for that star, shining over the house that held our holy family.

The darkness clouded Herod’s heart, setting a plan in place to abolish hope.

The darkness came in by dream, too, Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee.

The darkness covered the road ahead, the journey to Egypt long and frightful.

It always begins with darkness.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep... God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, that first day. - Genesis 1:1-5

It started in the darkness, in that first garden when God created life from dust. Molding and pressing, God’s fingertips imprinted clay until a body was revealed. Molding and pressing, God’s fingertips imprint our own lives, creating us out of the darkness. Each moment shapes us, a constant new creation.

It begins in the darkness with Jesus, too. With us - with understanding the depth of God’s love that would come to earth as a small, helpless, human form which was then cast into the shadow of Herod’s fear. A love that would know the depth of pain, suffering from the beginning. In the shadow of a night no long after his birth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ became a refugee, fleeing violence and seeking safety.
I wonder if the words of scripture echoed across the desert that night, as the holy family fled and all the families left behind became one, two, three or more fewer in number:

*Out of Egypt I called my son* - Hosea 11:1

*A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children.* - Jeremiah 31:15

*You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.* - Leviticus 19:33-34

They say our bodies carry memories, carry our past. They say these memories make us who we are.

This is the world in which Jesus the Christ was born. It is not the Christmas story often told because it is a horrifying story, a horrifying thought that a child would ever know a world like this, let alone in his earliest days. Matthew wastes no time taking us from the warmth of the manger to the cold, heartless reality of an escape to Egypt. Matthew wastes no time in telling us that as soon as the Magi celebrate the birth of God on Earth, Herod tries to nullify Christ’s light with the slaughtering of children. Yet, this is our story - a story acutely heard in our own world today. A story that perhaps echoes your own family’s story of coming to this country, escaping famine or oppression. A story that echoes the weeping of the mothers of children lost to death at our border - Jakelin Caal, age 7, and Felipe Gómez Alonzo, age 8. A story that demands our attention because all of Scripture demands our attention, does it not?

When God began creating the world, there was only darkness. It covered the earth and there was nothing, nothing, but a formless thick void. So God created light and called it good. And just as the darkness covered all God created, so did the light. The psalmist reminded us – *Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!* – there is praise to be given not only for the light but also for the darkness. *For without the darkness, there would be no light.* Night begets day; fear gives way to hope.

The story is not the same if we choose to stay in the stable with a sweet, sleeping family of three. It is beautiful and warm and cozy and lovely and makes for a great Christmas card but really, the incarnation is incomplete if we stay there. The celebration of Christ’s birth, the celebration of God coming to earth as a child, is about light shining in a deep darkness. Our story, at its very beginning, calls us to move from the bright light of the star of Bethlehem into the dark void of the desert night as Mary and Joseph and Jesus escape death. Our story calls us to be with a family and their fear of the unknown, to be present to those who struggle with finding their place in the world, to stand next to
those who mourn as Rachel did. Our story calls us to remember that if God came to earth in the form of a child named Emmanuel then God came to earth to be with us here, in this story, in this escape, in this horrifying scene of death, in this unknown land.

They say our bodies carry memories, carry our past. They say these memories make us who we are. The same is true for Jesus Christ. As the small, days-old child lay upon his mother’s chest and they rode across the desert to an unknown future, his life was being formed. As they made their way into Egypt and children died at the hands of an evil ruler, his life was being formed. As his family lived as refugees, his life was being formed. For Jesus to be fully God on earth, then Jesus needed to know the fullness, the interplay, of creation. Jesus needed to know how light comes from darkness, how darkness draws us in deep and needs a great light to find a way out. For Jesus to be God on earth, Jesus needed to first dwell in the pain and sorrow of his people so that then, His light could truly be the brightest light to ever shine in the darkness. This is where the journey begins. This is where our journey begins. May it be so. Amen.