

Out of Egypt

By [Erin Martin](#)

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Time is being stretched in the gospel narrative. With several allusions to the wise men, we look forward to next Sunday's celebration of Epiphany. With the several allusions to the Exodus we also look back to the Israelites held in bondage in Egypt. With the future, the present and the past seemingly all at hand, how do we draw out for our congregations a message from the manger?

The echoes tell us everything. When Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt, we naturally think of next week's nocturnal warning to the wise men to go home another way. When Herod murders any child two years old or under, we hearken back to Pharaoh and his deadly edict. Danger is everywhere. Even at his birth, Jesus is shadowed by destruction. Sister Margaret Eletta Guider calls it "living in the shadow of the manger." According to Guider, we see the fragility of Jesus' life, not only on the cross at Calvary, but also in the stable. From the beginning, Jesus is at risk.

He's a threat to power, and threats to power almost always result in violent attempts to wipe out those threats. In the manger scene, Jesus is King from day one. Shepherds and wise men alike adore him, but the human authorities don't want to share their thrones. King Herod forbids the adoration of anyone except him. In the Exodus, Pharaoh refuses to be weakened by the loss of his slave laborers, and, in our contemporary context, the United States government refuses to yield in its War on Terror. Will we ever learn?

Several weeks ago, President Bush announced that the administration's policy toward Iran would not change despite the release of a U.S. intelligence report indicating that Iran had suspended its atomic weapons program back in 2003. As Yogi Berra said, "This is déjà vu all over again." History has a way of bending back again and again to violence. But the good news of the gospel is that in the birth of Jesus, the reign of the "Prince of Peace" has been inaugurated. As Christians, we serve an infant king whose life on earth will disrupt the violent pattern of history and

reveal to us another way.

Jesus' exile in infancy and his journey out of Egypt are painful reminders to us in the church that often we are too often part of the violence. For the sake of our security, we pay tribute to the "powers that be," and the result can be deadly.

A couple of months ago, I went to see the movie, *In the Valley of Elah*. It's a complex and powerful movie that doesn't offer easy answers to the unraveling chaos in Iraq. I was deeply affected by the movie, and by the director's inscription that came at its close. On the screen was a photograph of an Iraqi child's dead body (a part of the movie that is crucial to the plot) with the words, "For the children," beneath it. Rachel still weeps for her children. She refuses to be consoled, and this Christmas, so should we.