

# Christmas and the stranger

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

Not everyone is going to be home for the holidays. Last weekend we took a plane to Boston. Seated beside us was a woman from El Salvador. She has been in the United States for five years, a legalized political refugee.

We talked about her going home to be with her mother and daughter. She sadly shook her head. Although the civil war is technically at an end, desperate economic conditions, a plethora of guns, and a vacuum in the power structure have created conditions in which violence, robbery and murder are the norm. She still cannot return safely. And the economic reality is that she earns in three days working as a housekeeper in a motel more than her professional daughter earns in a month.

It reminds one of Biblical times. Elimelech took his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to Moab because of difficult economic conditions in Bethlehem. The sons married local women. At the end of about ten years, both sons and Elimelech had passed on. Naomi heard that economic conditions in Bethlehem had improved and decided to return home. Ruth went with her.

After their sojourn abroad it seems they were just as much strangers in their homeland as they had been in Moab. None of the relatives stepped forward to help the two women. So Ruth went to work at the only respectable occupation she could find, gleaning in the fields. Her diligence, perseverance, and good character was duly noted and a distant relative, Boaz, stepped forward to care for the women. He married Ruth and their first child was Obed, the grandfather of King David. In fact, the genealogy of Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 1:5) mentions that Boaz begat Obed of Ruth.

So David was the grandson of an immigrant mother. This seems significant. An entire book of the Bible, Ruth, is devoted to this one story.

Perhaps as we consider the many contemporary meanings of the birth of Jesus, we can consider the importance of kindness to those among us who

may be far from home. Those who are displaced. Those who are working and struggling not just for themselves but for their extended family.

What if Ruth had not left her homeland to take care of Naomi? Her devotion, unselfishness, willingness to work, confidence in God blessed them both.

Most of the immigrants which we see in our community will not be home for the holidays. Most will be lonesome for the bright faces and loving embrace of father and mother, siblings and cousins. Most will send money home to help their families as Ruth supported Naomi.

Perhaps we can individually pray about how we can make this family time brighter for those far from family. God knows how we can help and will lead us in practical and tangible ways just as he opened Boaz's eyes to see how he could help Ruth and Naomi. Let us pray to be as unprejudiced as Boaz. If we help just one individual far from home, the universal message of Christmas will be seen to shine through us.

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