



Epiphany geography mapped our hearts

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt (Matthew 2:14).

It is not hard for me to imagine the pride I would feel if it were written in Holy Scriptures that the Holy Family had fled to my native North Dakota to be safe from the governor of Minnesota. I would make sure everybody I knew understood the importance my state had played in the salvation of the world. North Dakotans could do their part and fill in the parts of the story that Matthew left out. For example, Mary, Joseph and little Jesus probably crossed the Red River at what is now Fargo, stopped in Valley City for water after the long trek over the prairie, probably blessed St. John Lutheran Church in Jamestown as they moved west, and so forth and so on. It would make perfect sense to me.

The Christians here in Egypt are basically very much like North Dakotans (*simil justis et peccator*, actually). Everybody and her brother, Muslim and Christian, know that Egypt was host to Jesus and his family during a time of danger. At least 20 towns and monasteries from Rafah to Assiut, almost halfway to Sudan, are convinced they were blessed by the family's visit. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, no less, has published the fruit of their convictions in a glossy publication personally approved by the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church here. While historians might scratch their heads, Egyptians have no doubt. It makes perfect sense to them, too.

All of us, North Dakotans and Egyptians and others alike, live together on a small planet, Earth, and the astonished conviction among many of us is that God has actually visited our little place in the universe. But we don't have to depend on our imagination to piece together something of the visit. Our Christian forebears were good enough to write what they had seen and heard. It happened at Bethlehem, Luke says. He grew up in Nazareth, they all agree. He died on Golgotha, the stories say. He rose triumphant, the songs all sing. Not our pride, but our salvation. Not our boast, but our life.

The Rev. Mark Nygard served two parishes in North Dakota and two parishes in West Africa before coming to Egypt with his wife, Linda Nygard, to serve as graduate studies director at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo.



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