

# Migrant Mothers at Christmas

This Advent, I am overwhelmed by media coverage of migrant and refugee mothers and their courageous protection of their children. The heart-wrenching images have brought me new insights into the refugee, Mary, mother of Jesus, and the migration of Jesus into human vulnerability in the Incarnation - the deepest mystery of Christmas.



## Mary as Refugee

Mary is often portrayed in art as a pious, surreal and untouchable soul. But Scripture reveals a strong and courageous woman who responded with faith and trust to an inexplicable and risky request from God. She lived under Roman occupation and, while pregnant, was sent into forced exile to pay taxes. She gave birth in a stable because there was no room with the rich and powerful. This was not a romanticised nursery with friendly animals, but a crude, stench-filled shelter.

Then Mary and Joseph were forced to flee for safety when Herod ordered the slaughter of Hebrew babies.

## A Theology of Migration

Jesus grew to manhood under this culture. But his teaching in the Good Samaritan story overturns established beliefs about aliens and neighbours. It demands resisting the rhetoric that dehumanises and demonises migrants. He gives his life on the cross to reconcile us aliens because of our sin.

God calls us, through Christ, to migrate back to him.

The needs of migrants are crucial issues for our time. The U.N. estimates today's over 281 million migrants in catastrophic situations of exile, starvation and conflict could rise to 405 million by 2050. Amnesty International has identified the tragic failure of political leaders to deal with the cultural, political and economic systemic causes of forced migration.

## Pope Leo's Vision

Pope Leo, with paternal grandparent immigrants from Italy and France and maternal grandparents of Creole and multi-racial heritage, presents a unique vision. At an Oct. 4, 2025, World Day of Migrants and Refugees Mass for 40,000 missionaries and migrants, he said: *"Migrants help revitalize ecclesial communities...should be recognized and appreciated as a true divine blessing...who gives new energy and hope to Church."*

This hope is essential because many have responded to the tragic images with "tragedy fatigue" and lost empathy and compassion.

On Oct. 2, 2025, Pope Leo XIV addressed his alma mater, Villanova, at a conference co-sponsored by Vatican dicasteries and warned against *"the globalization of powerlessness."* He acted to establish the Mother Cabrini Institute on Immigration at the Vatican to support Catholic university research on migration, including a theology of migration and education on the need for a new social order of inclusion.

This Christmas, may the suffering of millions move us beyond our comfortable and nostalgic greetings and gatherings to unleash the full power of the Nativity.

Let all mothers experience the miracle of birth in safety.

May joy and peace reign for all.

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