



Jos Jottings, December 2023 “The Lord is our help and refuge”

On 27 December our Scripture Union “WordLive” daily Bible reading app (a great free resource available to us all) had my wife and I reflecting on Matthew 2:13-23, the story of Joseph taking Mary and the infant Jesus to safety in Egypt. This was just ahead of Herod the Great massacring all male children under the age of two in Bethlehem, in a vain attempt to remove the threat to him posed by Jesus coming to us as a fragile and vulnerable human baby, but as Lord of all.

Jesus’s earliest human life experience was then of being a refugee, fleeing with his family from unspeakably barbaric and evil violence, from an evil ruler who sought to silence the Word of God before he could even speak. But it was also of being protected, against all odds, by his loving heavenly Father, whose plan for saving his world and his beloved children is unstoppable too. Jesus knows intimately our human experience of feeling powerless in face of overwhelming violence and evil, but also of the experiencing the amazing care of God the Father in the midst of evil.

I mention this because you will recall that last month I especially encouraged prayer for our Christian sisters and brother in Nigeria, particularly Plateau State, over this last Christmas period, for safety from violent ethnic cleansing attacks. You may have thought I was being overly-dramatic in saying that some of these fellow-believers would likely not survive attendance at their Christmas services?? I wish I had been. Events since then have proven me optimistic, if anything.

According to local reports, Morning Star News reported on 26 December (and local officials confirmed) that between the evening of 23 and the morning of 25 December alone, more than 160 Christian villagers were massacred in well-coordinated attacks on more than 20 villages in the adjacent Local Government Areas of Bokkos, Barakin Ladi, and Mangu (respectively approximately 70kms, 40kms and 60kms due south of Jos City, the capital of Plateau State). By 3 January, the estimated death toll has risen to 295, according to Barnabas Aid contacts. Many of those killed were preparing to celebrate Christmas in services and other gatherings, reports consistently blaming armed Fulani Islamic extremists backed up by other terrorist groups. Several pastors and their families were killed (including Rev Solomon Gushe, the Baptist pastor of Dares village, along with nine family members; and Rev Jonathan Daluk of Tudun Mazak village, along with his mother and brother). But most of the victims were women, children and those too old to flee. More than 200 homes have been officially confirmed as destroyed, along with villagers’ possessions. One village in Barakin Ladi LGA buried its 26 dead in a Christmas Day service, probably about the same time we were enjoying our Christmas lunches (photo courtesy of Morning Star News).





With more than 300 wounded in hospital, Plateau State Governor Muftwang has condemned the attacks as completely unprovoked. Christian mother Nanchin is seen here recovering in hospital with machete wounds along with two of her daughters after a Christmas Eve militant attack on her village. This attack killed more than 20 villagers, mainly women and children, and left Nanchin's third daughter in a major hospital in Jos with life-threatening injuries (report and photo courtesy of Barnabas Aid).

In the midst of all this, despite the failure of government agencies and the security forces to protect Christian villagers, they say they look to God and the authorities for justice. One

pastor from Bokkos LGA is quoted by Barnabas Aid as saying, "We do not and will not go for any reprisals or attacks. The Lord is our help and refuge." Friends, my prayer this new year is that we be generous in standing with our Nigerian sisters and brothers in their suffering, and that we be as outstanding in our Christian witness as they are, when every earthly instinct in them would incline them to justice via vengeance. May their exemplary response, like that of the Lord Jesus himself, to irrational and deadly human hatred, be an inspiration and example to us in putting our trust firmly in the justice which Jesus will one day bring, and in the saving grace he calls us to show to others.

These heart-breaking events highlight even more strongly the importance of our three "partnership in mission" projects with the Diocese of Jos: emergency relief for the thousands of displaced and traumatised Christian villagers (including emergency health care); the care and education in a safe environment of the many "at risk" orphans and disadvantaged children who are victims of this genocide; and the training of Christian community leaders who can provide gospel-driven leadership and hope, both in pastoral care and community development initiatives. Let's keep giving generously in this new year, genuinely laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven.

More "Thank you"s!

A special "Thank you" to the Jos support team at St George's Pearce, who raised over \$2,000 before Christmas in support of construction of the Pankshin/Tambes campus of the Zambiri School, which is designed to be a haven for the care and education of orphans and disadvantaged kids! Their production of a series of special Christmas cards with photos of Zambiri School kids was a very creative and well-received initiative, alongside many yummy consumables!

For prayer:

- Please pray **by name** for the Plateau State villages attacked over the Christmas weekend (NTV, Maiyanga, Ruku, Hurum, Daruwat, Dares, Chirang, Ruwi, Yelwa, Ndun, Ngyong, Murfet, Makunday, Tamiso, Chiang, Tahore, Gawarba, Dares, Meyenga, Darwat and Butura Kampani), for comfort, justice, healing and hope, especially for those bereaved, injured and traumatised.
- Pray for wisdom for the Nigerian Anglican House of Bishops as they move to select a new Bishop for Jos in early 2024.
- Keep praying for Nigerian Government leaders at federal and state level to be convinced of the need to act to bring peace, safety and effective protection to the ordinary people of Nigeria, as well as non-corrupt government.

To make a tax-deductible donation to Diocesan partnership projects for training at the Christian Institute, or to support our persecuted fellow-Christians in Plateau State in Nigeria, or ministry to "at risk" children", go to <https://anglicanaid.org.au/locations/Nigeria> , and select the project of your preference. To book a presentation on the situation in Nigeria and our partnership with Jos Diocese for your church, school or fellowship group, contact Rev Canon Patrick Cole on pandncole@bigpond.com .