



In Those Days and In These

*An Advent Guide for Lectionary Year C
from the North Carolina Council of Churches*

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Introduction

How desperate would your life need to be for you to leave everyone and everything you knew in pursuit of a better one? To venture into a new place where you were a vilified stranger? To risk death?

For the immigrants and refugees making their way out of crisis, what lies ahead of them may appear to be opportunity, but inevitably what lies behind them is tremendous grief.

The North Carolina Council of Churches has worked for decades to make our state and nation a more welcoming place for those fleeing other countries. Policy on refugee resettlement adopted by the Council's Governing Board in 1979 reads in part:

And we affirm that God's loving kindness, which reaches out to us in our need, impels us to reach out to these who are homeless and destitute. Christian compassion requires that we open our hearts, hands, homes, churches, and communities to those who seek a place to lay their heads.

As people of faith whose beliefs are grounded in a child born to displaced parents, we must heed the call to welcome with compassion, to protect the vulnerable, to share what we have with those who have nothing.

The staff of the Council decided that the theme for this year's Advent study guide would be refugees. Clearly the issue is of pressing importance, but we are not the first to address the needs of our sisters and brothers in crisis.

Interestingly, two of the Gospel passages begin with the same words, "In those days." But the words and messages apply in these days, as well.

We hope that this guide will provide an opportunity for prayerful reflection within your faith community, your family, and on your own. There are children's activities to help even the very young consider the challenges facing the world they will inherit.

In this busy season, may we all take the time to think deeply, pray fervently, and act compassionately in this world, in these days.

**~The Staff of the NC Council of Churches
Advent 2015**

First Sunday in Advent — Luke 21:25–36

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

During the season of Advent, we reflect on the Lord's coming in its many dimensions – God's historical coming in the past, the signs of God's presence in our lives now, and above all on God's coming at the end of time in some unknown moment in the future.

As we look to the heavens to make sense of what is happening on earth, Luke 21:25-26 depicts a scene that does not seem otherworldly when we consider the realities of global climate change and the darkness of a future unknown.

As we notice the signs of our times, we can easily become overwhelmed. Scarce natural resources such as drinking water are likely to become even more limited. Food security, already a significant concern, will become even more challenging.

Right now, we see our sisters and brothers displaced disproportionately by violence in their countries of origin. The day could also come, if we don't respond rapidly, that there could be millions of climate refugees. Already, the fallout from dramatic shifts in weather is fueling instability in countries with the most vulnerable populations. As

entire nations experience a global problem in which no individual is exempt, we are being called to judgment without exception.

What message does the gospel offer such a world in crisis? What reason do we who fear for the future of humanity have to “stand up and raise our heads” at the coming of our Lord and Savior into our lives?

As Pope Francis recently released the first encyclical in the history of the Vatican to address environmental concerns, he said, “This is aimed at everyone: Let us pray everyone can receive its message and grow in responsibility toward the common home that God has given us.”

The following quotes are from the encyclical letter “On Care for Our Common Home”:

“The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” (Chapter 1, paragraph 23)

“If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. A rise in the sea level, for example, can create extremely serious situations, if we consider that a quarter of the world’s population lives on the coast or nearby, and that the majority of our megacities are situated in coastal areas.” (Chapter 1, paragraph 25)

“A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.” (Chapter 2, paragraph 91)

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.” (Chapter 6, paragraph 202)

“We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.” (Chapter 6, paragraph 229)

The encyclical is bringing much needed attention and focus to the related moral, social, and ecological issues of global climate change. Once we have awakened to see the signs of our times, we best have the good sense to be ready and prepared for what is to come.

It is through our eternal faith in the power and light of God's love that we are inspired and empowered to live in a way that supports the healthy growth of all life on earth.

It is in the parable of the budding of the trees and the promise of spring to come that we are shown hope for our future. We must raise our heads up high with the courage and hope that sustains our belief in God through all times, as we prepare to meet our maker.

Prayer:

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

---Canticle of Creation (by St. Francis of Assisi)

~Susannah Tuttle

Second Sunday in Advent — Luke 3:1–6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 'Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight.
 Every valley shall be filled,
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
 and the crooked shall be made straight,
 and the rough ways made smooth;
 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

What strikes me first about this Gospel passage is how much of it is spent explaining exactly who's in charge. Emperors and governors, rulers and priests. There's a lot of hierarchy and people with titles.

And then we get to who is getting something done. That would be John, Zechariah's boy, who was hanging out in the wilderness until the call came. Go, you untitled-opposite-of-entitled-wilderness-wandering-son-of-no-one-in-particular and take responsibility for preaching the word of God.

People in high places don't always pay attention to the Johns of this world, at least not until they have to. They are more concerned with power and the others who wield it. Folks they perceive as their equals rather than acknowledging that Jesus thought we all should be equal.

Next we get to the words of Isaiah which seem to be all about making the journey easier, smoother, and more direct. We are straightening paths, filling valleys, flattening speed bumps, and fixing potholes. Because the distance between God and God's beloved children should be as direct and obstacle-free as possible. If they'd had GPS, it would have been steering them around the traffic jams and road construction.

When we think of our sisters and brothers who are refugees from Syria, as with refugees from other countries and throughout history, we know that they did not become priorities for many of those in power until the numbers became too huge to ignore. Until they were knocking at Europe's door so persistently, that no one could close the blinds, turn out the lights, and pretend they were not at home. When people started to drown in the crossing, their bodies washing up on otherwise pristine beaches, the folks with the titles had to respond. Never mind the aid workers and NGO leaders, many of them affiliated with faith-based groups, who have been warning of an impending crisis while doing all they could to avert one.

So now the question becomes how difficult will we make the path? How many obstacles will be thrown up between refugees fleeing horrible circumstances and the relative safety that more stable countries might offer. Will we, as people who worship a baby born far from his parents' homeland, work to make the lives of refugees better?

Even those of us without titles – but who live in relative comfort and reasonable ease – have to recognize our ability to bring about change. We can donate or host, we can advocate and hold accountable. We can try to be sure the system isn't stacked against the vulnerable – that the process isn't harder than it really needs to be just to wear out and grind down as many spirits as possible.

In this season of Advent, our time of watchful waiting, may we not confuse this with a call to passive patience. There are paths to be straightened, mountains to be lowered, lopsided ways to be evened. And we, the untitled, must be prepared to proclaim the need on behalf of those whom the rulers try to ignore.

Prayer: Our God of high places and low places and of the people who live in both, help us to work toward that middle place where we can live and work together in safety, love, and peace.

~Aleta Payne

Third Sunday in Advent — Luke 3:7–18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

This passage in Luke begins with John berating believers from all walks of life as they have come to be baptized. I have always read the response of the masses, "What then should we do?" as a respectfully asked question where the body of believers yearned for the answer. But if it were me in that situation, I would probably be a little defensive. I would probably be sarcastic and outwardly frustrated as I asked the question, "Okay, what do you want me to do about it???" I probably would not want to hear the answer and I would probably ignore the answer.

John had an answer. "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." So why do the tax collectors and soldiers ask the question again? Did they not think the answer applied to them? As people of faith, John was talking to all of us, and he clearly states that we **MUST** share our coats and

food with those who are lacking. John did not say we ought to share our coats or food if the opportunity presented itself. John said we **MUST**.

This is not the only time we are presented with these instructions to give generously of ourselves and possessions. Let us not forget the last parable told in Matthew 25, "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

As millions are fleeing war-torn and downtrodden countries right now. We **MUST** share our blessings with them. Be people of faith and bear good fruit.

There are a number of local organizations providing resources for refugees. One particular organization, North Carolina US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, provides the opportunity for community members and groups to welcome newly-arrived refugees into their homes. The Welcome Home Project asks volunteers to secure furniture and household goods and set up the house for the arrival of the family. Other organizations use volunteers to visit with refugees, assist with legal documents, and provide transportation to appointments.

So what then should we do? We asked the question. Will we roll our eyes and come back to the answer when it suits us or will we work to carry out these faithful acts?

Prayer: Dear Lord, give me the strength and courage to share the many blessings I have with others. May my choices reflect my faith and honor you. Amen.

~Ashley Yohman

Fourth Sunday in Advent — Luke 1:39–45, 46–55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
 He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Perspective is everything. It influences what we see, what we hear, and what we think. Often, if we haven't seen it or heard it before, we have a difficult time imagining it. Stories that others tell us might not seem real until we know something about their truth first hand. For example, we might not know what the people of Syria, Palestine, Central America (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) experience when they flee their homes in search of safety. But lately, some of us have been forced from our homes by fire and water, so we do know something about what it means to run away without

knowing when or if we will return. After we have approximating experiences, we can extrapolate from them and begin to understand other scenarios. This becomes especially important when we think we know what someone else has experienced without taking time to listen to them and to learn from them.

There are several things we can learn if we pay attention to Mary and Elizabeth in this report from Luke.

- Elizabeth is in her second trimester of pregnancy—she feels the baby move, which rarely happens before week 16.
- Mary looks to Elizabeth for support and mentoring—she went to see Elizabeth with news of her own pregnancy as soon as possible and then stayed for 3 months (v. 36). $6+3=9$, so it's likely Mary stayed until Elizabeth's baby was born.
- Elizabeth believes Mary's baby is destined for great things—"blessed is the fruit of your womb," "mother of my Lord," and ". . . a fulfillment."
- Mary is a good poet—"My soul magnifies the Lord . . ."

Pay very careful attention now because this is not your average poem. This kind of poem turns words into action. What Mary sings aloud comes into being the way words brought the world into being when God spoke them aloud in another famous poem. God said, "Light," and there was light (Gen 1:3), followed by sky (Gen 1:8), then earth (Gen 1:10), and so on until God finally said, "humankind" (Gen 1:26).

Mary says, "blessed," and it is so. Mary says, "mercy," and it is so. Mary says, "lifted up," "filled," and "helped." Each of these words becomes reality when she speaks them aloud. In fact, Mary speaks in the past tense. God "has scattered the proud," "brought down the powerful," and "sent the rich away empty." This tells us something important about our God. Our God has already made the world the way Mary describes it. Her poem is a gift for us, so that we might see what she saw, which is what God shows us.

Mary's words are powerful words, words that make the world a different place from what it appears to be. They make the world a more just place, a more peace filled place, a more hospitable place, a better place. They are words we should all thrill to hear. Unless—and here is where we must really pay attention—unless we are the proud, the powerful, and the rich. Then these words are a threat. Now we must use our arrogance, power, and wealth to tell a different story, a story of fear and weakness and scarcity. Indeed, this different story becomes the story that drives our behavior. We isolate ourselves from suffering, we protect ourselves with concealed weapons, we insulate ourselves with wealth. And now we can no longer see the world God has given us, the world Mary sees so clearly.

Advent is a time of preparation. Perhaps we can begin by donning the lens of faith and changing our perspective. When we see clearly, we can clearly choose. Will we believe the story Mary tells us or continue to believe the story the world tells us?

Prayer: Great God of the Promise, Mary tells of your mercy and grace, showing us the world as you have always meant for it to be. Give us eyes to see clearly what she knows completely, so that we might live more fully into the grace you provide. We pray as we wait on the one whose life, death, and resurrection focused fully on your presence. Amen.

~ Jennifer Copeland

Christmas Eve and Day — Luke 2:1–14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When I was growing up, I, like many children, always looked forward to the annual Christmas pageant at church. It was an opportunity to be an angel, shepherd, camel, or even a king. There were more or less fantastic sets, props, singing and maybe dancing (depending on your denomination). It's a story with a happy ending and as a child you learn the basics about the Holy Family — they go on a great trip, an angel appears, a baby is born, the Magi come and bring presents, and we all sing Silent Night. The end. However, as an adult, I realize that this birth narrative is not the happy story that I was raised on. This was not a fun vacation for Mary and Joseph, but rather a long, difficult trip forced upon them by the government. Moreover, when they reached their destination, they were not welcome. They were strangers with no one who would show them any kind of hospitality. Although our Christmas pageants portray cute animals to keep Mary company while she gave birth, in reality the birth of Jesus occurred in a setting that was dirty, dark, and lonely.

A similar experience is playing out in the United States today. Immigrants from Latin

America are being forced to journey north for the sake of their families and because their own governments cannot guarantee their livelihood or safety. Like the Holy Family, these immigrants often do not receive hospitality in this country; instead they find only hostility. Like Mary and Joseph, many immigrants feel like strangers in their new country and they are forced to live their lives separated from their families and in the shadows.

We live in a time when sixty million people are displaced globally, including more than 10 million Syrian refugees and tens of thousands of immigrant children and families held in detention in the United States — all of whom have fled the violence, crime, and extreme poverty of their home countries. How should we respond to these men, women, and children who come to other countries seeking a better life? As politicians debate immigration and refugee quotas and the need for a more secure border, let us remember that the Holy Family sought refuge and was also turned away. Jesus tells us that a response to the most vulnerable is a response to Jesus himself (Matthew 25:40). Christ comes to our doorstep in the waves of children and families coming across the border. As Christians we are required to respond with love and compassion rather than fear of scarcity and exclusion of others.

Just as we celebrate the life of Christ and remember it with dignity and respect, so should we respect the children and families who have come to our country for a better life and treat them with benevolence. As we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, let us also remember that he was a child, born to a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and hospitality. I pray that we all might learn to welcome migrants and refugees who, like the Holy Family so long ago, courageously cross borders in the present day.

Prayer: Compassionate God, make your loving presence felt to refugees and migrants, torn from home, family and everything familiar. Warm, especially, the hearts of the young, the old, and the most vulnerable among them. Help them know that you accompany them as you accompanied Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in their exile to Egypt. Lead refugees and migrants to a new home and a new hope, as you led the Holy Family to their new home in Nazareth. Open our hearts to receive them as our sisters and brothers in whose face we see your son, Jesus. Amen. (Source: Assisting Refugee Resettlement Using Parish Energies; www.bc.edu/bc_org/prs/stign/arrupe.html)

~Jennie Belle

Suggestions for Family Discussions and Activities

Choose activities that are best suited for the age of your children. The discussions could be held during family dinners or made a part of the bedtime ritual. If you choose a family project, it can be done throughout the Advent season and beyond.

Introduction

Tell the children that for the next four weeks you will be talking about refugees. Explain that refugees are people displaced from their homes and countries who move to find a safer, healthier, more productive life. Have children make placemats for each week with simple suggestions for prayers when the family shares a meal.

Week One: Refugees from Drought

1. Explain that [droughts](http://eschooltoday.com/natural-disasters/droughts/what-is-a-drought.html) are one reason people leave their homes in search of a better life (<http://eschooltoday.com/natural-disasters/droughts/what-is-a-drought.html>). Use a world map or globe to identify the [severe drought areas](http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/06/global-tour-7-recent-droughts) of the world (www.wri.org/blog/2015/06/global-tour-7-recent-droughts). Explain that droughts cause crops to die and livestock to die and then humans can no longer survive in that area and have to move to find a place to survive. Use ideas from [this site](http://www.ready.gov/kids/know-the-facts/drought) to identify ways the kids can make a difference (www.ready.gov/kids/know-the-facts/drought).
2. Play an [online game](http://climatekids.nasa.gov/time-machine/) with the children that explains global warming and see what the future holds (<http://climatekids.nasa.gov/time-machine/>).
3. After discussing drought, ask the children to think of ways they can make a difference. For example, offer ways to save water so there will be enough for everyone. For older children and teens, take the [13 gallon challenge](http://www.dosomething.org/campaigns/13-gallon-challenge) (www.dosomething.org/campaigns/13-gallon-challenge).
4. Make a [rainstick](http://climatekids.nasa.gov/rainstick/) or another project (<http://climatekids.nasa.gov/rainstick/>).
5. As a family, sign the Climate Care Affirmation at [NC Interfaith Power & Light](http://www.ncipl.org) (www.ncipl.org) and the [Paris Pledge Campaign](http://www.parispledge.org/) (www.parispledge.org/).
6. Find books on climate change and water conservation, such as:
 - *Why Should I Save Water*, by Jen Green
 - *Watch Over Our Water*, by Lisa Bullard
 - *Our World of Water: Children and Water Around the World*, by Beatrice Hollyer

- *A Kid's Guide to Climate Change and Global Warming: How to Take Action*, by Cathryn Kaye
- *Fifty Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth*, by Earthworks Group
- More facts and figures: [Climate Change and Children](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Climate_Change_and_Children.pdf) (www.unicef.org/publications/files/Climate_Change_and_Children.pdf).

Week Two: Refugees from War and Violence—Who is in Charge Makes a Difference

1. Share that people often become refugees because they have no political or personal power, making them less valuable and unimportant to the powerful people that control them. Share that more than half of the world's refugees are children, who have no power at all, but they still suffer. Share that often countries or regions are at war (more than thirty armed conflicts are going on around the world). Use the map or globe from last week to show countries that are at war or who have violent rulers (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ongoing_armed_conflicts).
2. Explain refugees from a war-torn country with a book:
Azzi in Between, by Sarah Garland
Refugee Boy, by Benjamin Zephanrah
One Day We Had to Run, by Sybella Wilkes
3. Find a way to donate to a refugee relief effort (e.g. UNICEF, Salvation Army's Syrian Refugee Relief Effort).
4. Write to your US Representative or Senator, the White House, or the United Nations asking for their support to stop the siege of cities, to promote security for medical aid, and to find diplomatic solutions to crises.
5. Have the children imagine that they have to leave their home very quickly for a long time. Ask what three things they would take with them.
6. Investigate whether a refugee family is being hosted in your area, perhaps by your church. Find ways to be helpful to them (food, clothing, furniture, job search, inviting them to your home for a meal).

Week Three: Sharing Our Blessings with Refugees or Connecting Your Children to God's Heart

1. Share that refugees usually do not have some of the basic necessities like food, water, clothing, or shelter. Explain that there are many people that have the same challenge here around them (homelessness, families displaced by natural disasters or by house fires). Encourage the children to come up with things your family can do to help people here as well as far away.
2. It is important to find concrete ways to model generosity so that sharing seems a normal part of life. Children need to see you share your time, your talent and your money to help people. Buy extra food at the market; participate in a coat drive; volunteer at a feeding ministry at a shelter for the homeless; collect used and new toys to be donated to other children.
3. Sponsor a food drive at your church or in your community for the local Food Bank.
4. If you are in contact with a refugee family, invite them to share your family's holiday traditions and offer to learn about their culture as well.
5. Prepare shoeboxes for the [Project Agape](http://nccumc.org/outreach/project-agape) (<http://nccumc.org/outreach/project-agape>) or plan a donation to [Heifer International](http://www.heifer.org) (www.heifer.org). Be sure to involve your children in these types of projects.
6. Collect items for emergency kits for a local shelter (Band-Aids, antibacterial ointment, aspirin, etc.).
7. Start your own charity group to raise funds for any of the projects listed above.
8. Read *The Blessings Jar: A Story About Being Thankful*, by Collen Coble.

Week Four: Putting Yourself Into a Refugee's Perspective

1. By the age of six, most children have developed the ability to express empathy. If appropriate, ask your children to put themselves into the place of refugees that have been forced from their homes in search of safety. Ask them to share what that experience would be like. Don't force children to talk about things until they are ready. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing a story.
2. Visit a local fire station and ask if there is a family that may need help after losing their home to a fire. Work with your children to gather items that the family needs. If the fire station cannot share the name, perhaps they will volunteer to take the items to the family.

3. Find an example in story, or in your situation, that will give you the opportunity to teach tolerance of other races, religions, economic status, etc., to your children.

Week Five: Responding to Refugees Is the Same as Responding to Jesus

1. Share the Christmas stories from Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-23 with the children. Emphasize that the family had a very hard trip to a strange, new place and were not warmly welcomed. They were like the refugees we have been talking about. Discuss what the baby Jesus needed when he was born (a safe place to sleep, a warm blanket, diapers). What did Mary and Joseph need (rest, food, a safe place to sleep)? Move to discussing what a refugee needs (food such as rice, tuna, water; sleeping bag; clothes including socks and underwear; shelter; help communicating in a different language). Point out that the needs are very similar and Jesus said responding to the needs of others is the same as responding to Jesus (Matthew 25:40).
2. Check out the [Church World Service website](http://www.cwsglobal.org/get-involved/welcome-a-refugee/) for information on helping to welcome refugees. (www.cwsglobal.org/get-involved/welcome-a-refugee/)
3. There may be a refugee family in your area that needs your hospitality, help with transportation, or help getting oriented to their new life.
4. Many denominations have programs to assist refugees. Make a family donation in honor of a loved one that will help to change the life of a refugee.

~Rose Gurkin

RESOURCES

Organizations for Refugee Service

[World Relief Durham](http://www.worldreliefdurham.org/refugees): Faith-based NGO engaging in resettlement work which “seeks to equip churches to think biblically about refugees who are arriving to the Triangle and encourages them to extend Christ-like hospitality to our refugee neighbors.”
(www.worldreliefdurham.org/refugees)

[Church World Service-RDU](http://www.cwsrdu.org): Non-profit in the Triangle which connects refugees with community resources and social services, along with providing legal services for the immigration process.
(www.cwsrdu.org)

[US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants in NC](http://www.refugees.org/about-us/where-we-work/north-carolina/): Federal agency which advocates for displaced peoples and develops strategies for integration into new communities. The NC office has reception and resettlement programs in the Triangle.
(www.refugees.org/about-us/where-we-work/north-carolina/)

[Uprooted/Rerouted](http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/uprooted-rerouted): Project recently completed by Duke students exploring the dynamics of international refugee issues.
(<http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/uprooted-rerouted>)

[Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency](http://carolinarefugee.org/): Organization in Charlotte that is “Providing resettlement services to refugees and asylees who are escaping violence, persecution, and repression, without regard to their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.”
(<http://carolinarefugee.org/>)

Articles on Christian responsibility in the Refugee Crisis:

[Huffington Post](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trudy-smith/welcoming-jesus-home-a-ch_b_8136886.html), “Welcoming Jesus Home: A Christian Response to Refugees”:
www.huffingtonpost.com/trudy-smith/welcoming-jesus-home-a-ch_b_8136886.html

[The Christian Century](http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-10/other-refugee-children), “The Other Refugee Children”:
www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-10/other-refugee-children

[Christian Today](http://www.christiantoday.com/article/refugee.crisis.why.the.bible.doesnt.allow.us.to.turn.our.backs.on.drowning.children/63708.htm), “Refugee crisis: Why the Bible doesn’t allow us to turn our backs on drowning children”:
www.christiantoday.com/article/refugee.crisis.why.the.bible.doesnt.allow.us.to.turn.our.backs.on.drowning.children/63708.htm

~Austin Wilson