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## Where is God?

The untimely pregnancy sets tongues a wagging in this Palestinian village. A young maiden's betrothed does the socially improper, politically incorrect, religiously unacceptable thing; he stays true to his fiancée.

On top of that drama, a repressive governmental policy sends them on a 90-mile trek in the last weeks of the young girl's challenging, faith-stretching nine months.

A baby is born, in a barn. Less than ideal, less than reasonable. He is the Son of God they believe. He looks like any other baby, however. Somehow young Joseph probably finds some work and finds new living quarters.

Not too long after, a heavenly messenger sends them packing. It seems they are a very persecuted minority. This Jewish family is driven by a Roman tyrant to an African refuge. Was there illegal immigration involved? Do they hear of the savage bloodletting back in Bethlehem? Is it safe to assume some of the families grieving unspeakable loss are those known to Mary and Joseph? These intercontinental refugees have to wonder if life will ever settle down.

Where is God anyway? Where is God when a heathen government makes difficult times for God's chosen people? Where is God when you're trying to trust Him and every step is another step of difficulty and challenge? Where is God when you're trying to obey Him and all you get is more hardship? Where is God when you have sacrificed your security, abandoned your larger family circle, when you feel like He is leading but He leaves you virtually scrambling for your life?

The Christmas story drips universal appeal, leaks reality, reeks of relevancy.

Christmas is Emanuel. God with us. Where is God? He's in the middle of it, choosing to ride in the womb of a teenage girl over the miles of hill and vale, making His entrance in a feed box. Mary cries out in the pangs of labor. Jesus emerges. He's in the pain. He's in the pain of human existence, the pain of a depraved race, the pain of a corrupt, sinful people. Snatched up by young parents under a midnight sky and carried across wastelands to another continent. He is in the strug-

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gle of people trying to stay alive. He understands repression, violence, refugees, hunger, homelessness, and persecution.

The fear of Sudanese people driven from their lands by brutal warriors is not foreign to God. The passion of a young man from Guatemala walking, hitchhiking from his home and then sneaking into the U.S. hoping for a better life for his family is not strange to the Lord. The fervor of two young believers in Iran who are threatened with execution if they do not renounce Jesus does not escape our Sovereign's eye. The uncertainty of a Baptist congregation in a southern city of Kyrgyzstan due to new Islamic-driven governmental restrictions is understood by the Head of the church. The harsh "not-gonna-change-anytime-

soon" conditions creating a 95 percent unemployment rate for the Palestinian congregation at First Baptist Church Bethlehem does not escape the Savior's notice.

Where is God? God is in the middle of all of it. He works not just in spite of this, He works through it. God is not bound. He is not bound by the economy, by politics, by health, by religion, or the lack thereof.

He doesn't need a smooth road. He doesn't need red states. He doesn't need Republicans or Democrats in power. He doesn't need friendly emperors. He doesn't need peace. He doesn't need

a friendly culture. He doesn't need a home. He doesn't need a budget. He works through the heathen. He works through the power hungry. He works through trouble, trial, tribulation, and terror. He works through humble, available, trusting servants. He works through teenagers.

Jesus understands our world. He is in it. He's in every believer, in every culture, in any country, in every local assembly that worships Him and follows Scripture.

Christmas is the story of God's identification with people who are beyond hope. Christmas is the story of God's awesome power at work in a broken world to bring redemption to all who will believe. For with God nothing shall be impossible.

The Christmas story is our story.