

# The Scandal of Christmas

by Mark Adams, Coordinator, Frontera de Cristo

On the Tuesday before Christmas Day, as I was crossing the border on foot into the United States for the 1302nd “Healing Our Borders” prayer vigil, I was struck by the image of the US flag behind the concertina wire. I was also conscious of the DANGER DO NOT ENTER signs that are plastered on both sides of the 18-foot steel bollard wall that we have built to divide ourselves from our neighbors to the south... especially the humble neighbors of whom Mary sang in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), or as Eduardo Galeano said “los nadies del mundo/the nobodies of the world,” or “Los Olvidados/The Forgotten Ones” that Luis Buñuel wrote about in his 1950 documentary. After the vigil at the Lirio de los Valles church, Noche Navideña, Pastor Ramón confirmed these connections in his reflection on Mary’s Magnificat.



Every Tuesday since December 12, 2000, we have gathered at 5:15 pm to remember our siblings who have died crossing the border. We do not know much about the 487 persons who have died in Cochise County (only a small portion of the more than 10,000 who have died borderwide) following President Bill Clinton’s implementation of the “prevention through deterrence” border policy. That policy poured billions of dollars into fortifying the border, intentionally using mountains and deserts as lethal deterrents to migration. This policy has been expanded under each successive administration, whether Democratic or Republican.

As I stood in line, I was thinking about how our government has continued to expand the border enforcement zone into the interior of the US, and how it is actively recruiting tens of thousands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to deport those who are living in the US without documentation. Despite their rhetoric of going after hardened criminals, the vast majority of the persons being deported are mothers, fathers, sisters, and/or brothers who are supporting the US and have no criminal background.

The foreman for a remodeling project of one of our partner churches in Nebraska was detained by more than a dozen masked men and deported to Mexico in less than a week’s time. A father of two teenagers, he had lived in the US for 33 years, since he was 11 years old. He was sent back to Mexico, a country he had not been in since his parents brought him to the US.

Many immigrant communities in the interior of the US are living in fear of this deportation force that demonizes whole groups of people. This summer, our mission delegation to our partner church in Nebraska visited the folklore ballet that their church hosts in their PEACE Community Center. Usually there were more than 25 children and youth participating, but this year participation has declined substantially because of the fear—there were just 7 participants when we were there because parents are afraid to be out in public and do not want to be separated from their children by ICE.



Our colleague David Bonilla lamented at a recent vigil that those who had survived the desert and have been working for years in the US are now being aggressively pursued by a government that has decided to prioritize going after immigrants over real dangers such as white collar crime, gun crimes, domestic terrorist groups, hate crimes, etc.

Our raising up this deportation force reminds me of how Herod raised up a force that sought to deport Jesus back across the divine/human border that he had crossed as a vulnerable babe. Jesus survived when Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with him as refugees to escape the policies that led to the deaths of thousands of male babies (Matthew 2).

During my first year here on the border, my brothers David and Carl visited me during the week before Christmas. Pastor Chuy Gallegos was giving them a tour of the border when David saw two men perched on the top of the fence looking east. David asked: “What are they doing?” Pastor Chuy responded: “Waiting” for the right time to cross the border.”

The right time for Jesus to cross the divine/human border was not without risk. That first Christmas, God did not wait to send Jesus into a world where peace, hope, joy and love reigned; instead, Jesus entered a world of conflict, despair, sadness, and hate.

The concept of NO ROOM IN THE INN is as prominent as ever on the US borders and is being illuminated in interior communities of the US as well. It is precisely in the midst of fear-filled communities whose vulnerable residents are being threatened by increasingly inhospitable policies that Jesus is born—Emmanuel—God with us.

When we light the candles of Advent on Christmas Day, we use a simple litany that we learned from one of the families of the church during a Noche Navideña many years ago:

En Jesus nace la paz del mundo/In Jesus the peace of the world is born  
En Jesus nace la esperanza del mundo/In Jesus the hope of the world is born

En Jesus nace el gozo del mundo/In Jesus the joy of the world is born

En Jesus nace el amor del mundo/In Jesus the love of the world is born

En Jesus nace la luz del mundo/In Jesus the light of the world is born.

May God grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, open arms to welcome, hands to serve, feet to follow, and hearts to trust Jesus—Emmanuel—God with us today and each day to come. ☐

