

## The Flight into Egypt

In Matthew's Gospel we find the story of how, after the visit of the Magi, the Holy Family were forced to flee to Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod. This has always been a popular subject for artists: a fine window in the South Aisle in St Bridget's shows the family making the journey with Mary on a donkey, and the family accompanied by angels.



As time went on it became popular to show the family resting during their journey. Here we have examples by Fra Bartholomeo, a Tuscan artist active at the start of the sixteenth century, and Pier Francesco Mola, a seventeenth century artist who was born in Switzerland, but who worked in Venice, Bologna and Rome.

These two pictures show why artists were drawn to the subject. One was that it enabled them to paint a landscape, but perhaps even more important was the opportunity to show an intimate family relationship. Such pictures are a reminder to us that all our relationships are important and that love is not just

something shared by two people. Groups of people, such as parents and their child, express a love that is more than just the sum of its parts. Think also of the Trinity, a relationship of love that holds between three people.



In Mola's picture the focus pulls back and the family are shown alone in a vast landscape, deserted except for the angel tending to the donkey in the background. This reminds us of the vulnerability of the infant Christ. Not only did our God become a baby entirely dependent on others to meet

his needs, but he became the child of a family without power, that had to flee and take refuge in a strange land in order to protect him. Most of all this should make us reflect on how the incarnation aligns our God with the poor and dispossessed, and that Jesus himself was a refugee and a displaced person. Especially this year, we should reflect on the millions displaced in Syria, and what we can do for them, recalling that whatever we do for them, we do for our Lord.