

*Christmas: The Story of the Exodus of all "Foreigners"*

"Once upon a time...", is how our story of "Those who fled because they were afraid" begins.

Once upon a time, it was night time, some three days before Christmas. Three men walked slowly across the market square of a small, German town. They stopped briefly in front of the church and sprayed "Foreigners, go home!" and "Germany is for Germans" on the wall. Stones flew through the window of the Turkish shop opposite the church. Then, the group moved on. And there was an eerie silence. The curtains at the windows of the honourable citizens closed quickly and discreetly.

No-one had seen a thing.

"Come on. That's it. Let's go."

"What do you mean? What on earth would we do down in the south?"

"Down in the south? Have you forgotten that that is where our home is? It'll only get worse here. We'll do what it says on the wall: "Foreigners, go home!"

And, believe it or not, the little town came alive in the middle of the night: first came the packets of cocoa, the chocolates and sweets in their Christmas wrappings. They wanted to return to West Africa and to Ghana, because that was where their home was. Then came the coffee, the Germans' favourite drink, in great chests and bags; to Uganda, Kenya and South America, to the home of coffee. Pineapples and bananas leapt fearfully from their crates, and so did the grapes and strawberries from South Africa. Almost all the Christmas goodies were on the move: gingerbread, speculatus and cinnamon biscuits, their spicy hearts drawing them back to India. The Dresden Christmas cake hesitated. You could see tears in his raisin eyes as he admitted: Half-castes like me have a really tough time. He was followed by Lübeck marzipan and Nuremberg gingerbread. It wasn't quality but place of origin which counted. But it wasn't until shortly before dawn that the cut flowers from Columbia finally began their homeward trek, just as the fur coats together with the gold and precious stones boarded their expensive charter aircraft with destinations throughout the world.

On that day there was complete traffic chaos. Long traffic jams of Japanese cars full to the brim with cameras, optical equipment and electronics as they slowly wended their way towards the east. High in the sky could be seen the Christmas geese returning to Poland, followed closely by fine, silk shirts and carpets from the Far East.

With a terrifying cracking sound, tropical timber broke loose from the imprisonment of the window frames and swished its way back to the valleys of the Amazon. You had to take great care not to slip, for there was oil and petrol seeping from everywhere, mere trickles joining forces to form streams for the journey back to the Near East. But plans had been made for everything.

Proud as proud could be, the German car industry revealed its emergency plans: a brilliant, new version of the wood-fired carburettor. Who needs foreign oil? - But the VW's and the BMW's began to fall apart into their component parts: the aluminium returned to Jamaica, the copper to Somalia, one third of the steel components to Brazil, and the rubber went back to Zaire. And the road surface had also seen better days when it was covered in foreign asphalt.

Three days later, it was all over. The exodus was complete. And just in time for Christmas. Not a foreign thing left in the whole of the country. But there were still Christmas trees, and apples, and nuts. And "Silent Night" could be sung - admittedly with special permission, as the song had originally come from Austria.

There was only one thing which did not quite fit the picture. Mary, Joseph and the infant had stayed on. Three Jews. Just imagine, three Jews.

"We're staying", said Mary, "if we leave, who on earth is going to show them the way back again, the way back to reason, common sense and humanity?"

(From: Helmut Wöllenstein, "Word for the Day" broadcast on 20.12.1991 on Hessischer Rundfunk, Germany. Translated by Tony Fitzpatrick)