

Travel by foot

Last Sunday's reflection stayed with me all week: the simple folk who respond to the message from God; Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, later on the disciples, and eventually the call to each of us to share the message of "God with us". These words opened my eyes to accompany the end of the Christmastide journey, now with the Magi – those who have seen the star and followed it, because they believed this bright star proclaimed something wonderfully new.

And during the week I read a short poem by RS Thomas. The poem speaks about the fourth king:

The first king was on horseback.
The second a pillion rider.
The third came by plane.

Where was the god-child?
He was in a manger
With the beasts, all looking

The other way where the fourth
was a slow dawning because
Wisdom must come on foot.

Boom! The closing call of last Sunday: ***we are here to tell the good news and to do those good deeds that help bring about God's Kingdom***, and the deep meaning of the poem followed me the rest of the week. We have a calling and because we usually live hectic times, our mission gets caught up in that rush and as a result it diminishes.

I came back time again and again to those times where all was hectic, fast, immediate. I'm afraid when people say: "*when we go back to normal*", I suspect normal is what got us into the mess. I don't want **that** normal, I look forward to something quite different, because these past months have shown us that we can live in a new way. While the virus seemed to travel by plane our life seemed to keep completely still. Are we wanting to go back to that impossible "race"? I liked the idea of the poem that wisdom must come on foot. I for one, hope for more wisdom in the time ahead.

Allow me then to go back a step or two. Today we celebrate Epiphany, even if a few days before it actually happens. ***Epiphany*** is a Greek word that means "***manifestation***" – in this case the manifestation of the divine child to the gentiles represented by the Magi, not really kings but rather sages, wise people, astrologers that followed the star. And interestingly enough, in their 'wisdom' they looked in the high places -the palace, and that disturbed the occupant who was then living in that palace; he was not amused because he was not interested in any other candidate taking his place. The travellers from the East learn in their journey that God works with a quite different wisdom, and in that God given wisdom they are guided to the stable, not the place where one expects to find a king.

In this journey, these wise men will have their wisdom increased beyond measure. The king they find is a different type of king, not a king as they expected. This child is king of a different kingdom, so much so that they are told to return home a different way, because Herod does not really want to honour the new-born, rather get rid of him. And it will be this journey home by a different way that is the clear lesson to us, and the one we find in the closing words of the poem.

I mentioned a few moments ago that I look forward to a “new normal”, and I believe that this is the time for our church to look towards the new way ahead which in many ways might be quite different from what was. I am sure we can learn from the journey of the Magi who are told to return home by a different route, the route they had come would not be the way for fullness of life, and so God shows them the need of a new way. Maybe we are standing at similar cross-roads: what we have done in the past, what we can do from now on. This time we live is one where we might have to take risks – faith risks, because God walks with us on the new way forward.

The way of the fourth (as we read in the poem), is a slow dawning because wisdom must come on foot... this is our journey. A slow one, because it is a journey not to power and honours and riches, but to wisdom, and that does take its time to emerge and become part of life. I then realised the wonderful reality that **we are that fourth Magi** – certainly part of what God wants for us and the world: *Gold, incense, myrrh thou canst not bring; offer thy heart to the infant King*; as we heard in the first hymn of today’s service.

As the Magi, we see the signs of God’s will, we have heard the Gospel stories, we have heard the letters to the early churches, but if all that just remains an interesting anecdote of history, we live a diminished life. We, like the Magi, experience the love of God and share in the simple things of every day; it is slow learning but deep learning, because we travel by foot, and we may have to take a new route forward; we know the Spirit travels with us!

The new year has just begun, let it be a different one -not in those things we have no control over, but in those things we can be part of - we who are loved by God and share God’s love, even if we travel by a different way to proclaim the value of life in these and all times. Let us then contribute to building that new normal which can be the way ahead for all. Amen

Robert

