

EPIPHANY – 2020

Isaiah 60:1-6
Eph 3:2a-3, 5-6
Mt 2:1-12

Some of you may know TS Eliot's poem, 'Journey of the Magi' that has been handed out to you. In this poem, one of the Magi recounts the journey he and others made many years previously. It begins, "A cold coming we had of it. Just the worst time of the year." The ways of the journey were deep, the weather sharp, the very dead of winter.

Eliot wrote this poem in 1927 one Sunday afternoon after he had been to an Anglo-Catholic mass in the morning. The opening lines are a quote from a Christmas sermon preached by Lancelot Andrewes before King James I in 1622.

The poem describes the very dangerous journey of the Magi over snow covered mountains which tired out the camels. They were at risk from robbers, suffered from the shortage of food and faced nothing but hostility from the inhabitants of the cities and villages. This journey caused them to have serious doubts about what they were doing especially when they remembered the sweet and plentiful life they had left behind. The Children of Israel had the same doubts when they were in the wilderness.

Despite the challenges and doubts they journeyed on and came across a temperate valley with streams, a water mill and vegetation. There are three trees in the distance and a white horse gallops in a meadow. Yet when the Magi reached the tavern with vines around the lintels and empty wineskins littering the floor, they were ignored by the members of the gambling school who were totally focussed on their own activities. The Magi journeyed on until they arrived at their destination.

Eliot treats the journey as an allegory of the spiritual journey of all of Christ's disciples. He stresses that Jesus' birth and death are not like everyone else's. His birth, life and death are visible expressions of the agony and ecstasy of the human race. The vines on the tavern door point the promise of new wine that will be stored in new wineskins. The three trees in the valley point to the Crucifixion and redemption of the world and the energy of the galloping white horse represents an uplift that is Spirit filled.

The journey of the Magi is the journey from the fleshpots of the secular world to the Kingdom of heaven that requires the death of the self to saying 'Yes' to God, even though at times that 'Yes' will be doubted or even regretted.

Following their Bethlehem experience life for the Magi was never the same. They were still in the world of self-centredness and paganism but not of it. They had imbibed the new wine of the Kingdom that this Christ child was to bring. They had found the one who brings new life when none was expected and the only response they could make was to fall down and worship the one who makes God available, accessible and approachable. It was only after

they had said, 'Yes' that they offered their gifts in his service. No wonder he storyteller looks forward to another death when he will meet God face to face.

The Journey of the Magi is also your journey and my journey. Like them, despite the trials and tribulations of life and the indifference of the secular pagan world, we must keep on saying 'Yes' until the time we share in the Supper of the Lamb.

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