



7 January 2023

Epiphany (Matthew 2:1-12)

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TS Eliot's poem and our Gospel reading take us to the Magi, the wise ones, their journey to find the Christ child, and their return by another way.

In Sartre's play /Barjona/, the Magi explain their journey to the Jewish headman who calls them doting old fools:

"Barjona, it is true that we are very old and very wise and we know all the evil in the world. Still, when we saw this star in heaven, our hearts leaped for joy like the hearts of children. We have been like children, and we set out on the road because we wanted to accomplish our duty as men, the duty of hope. The man who loses hope, Barjona, will be chased from his village, and cursed. The stones of the road will be rougher under his feet and the brambles more spiky. The load will weigh heavier on his back, all his misfortunes will plague him like angry bees, and everyone will mock him. But everything smiles on the man who hopes. For him the world is a gift. Come on then, see if you want to stay here or make up your mind to follow us."¹

Who is wise in our day, who inspires hope?

Who do we look to for wisdom? Siri? Alexis? Google? Mum, and dad? Scientists, philosophers, theologians? Politicians? Children? Homeless people? Or partners or lovers?

Or in the dailyness, where do we search for wisdom, Wisdom, which tells us who we are and where we are going?

Sometimes it comes from most unexpected sources. I find that it is when I make space, that I am open to receive wisdom. It may be on retreat, it may be after meditation or walking the Labyrinth, or sharing a meal with a homeless person.

Then the question is, what wisdom do you call yours?

listening? Practical expertise? Gardening? Science? Art? Public Service? Medicine? philosophical wisdom?

What wisdom do we bring to this God-with-us? Because we must bring something. We have lived long enough. Surely we have learnt something.

This relationship with the divine must include give and take, call does include give and take. In any relationship of love, coming out of the heart of love, there is an ease. Sometimes there are words, sometimes action, sometimes a physical gift, and sometimes silence. What do you offer?

Did they find what they came for, the wise ones?

Have we found what we were looking for?

Have you ever been grabbed by an angelic vision?

Inspired by a feeling in your gut?

Have you ever acted on that? That yes, or no. I have.

The wise ones in the story seek and follow and find in an unexpected place. They followed the stories of their tradition, which spoke of a Messiah to be born of a virgin. These were outsiders, Iranians probably, Zoroastrians, all a part of our Christmas story, part of our Christian story, which with the Hebrew tradition, always includes the possibility of strangers with wisdom, foreigners with knowledge and understanding, like the queen of Sheba visiting Solomon, the three angels who visited Abraham, the foreign women who challenged Jesus. Outsiders often see things more clearly.

I wonder whether I am open to experiencing God's presence, in those outside my circle? Children, elders, street people, those with addiction problems, homeless people, and those couch surfing. Do I find the Christ in them?

We heard last year from Elaine Furniss on refugee Saturday. She spoke of the love she receives, the wisdom she garners from her refugee friends. Just one week at Kaleidoscope confirms the wisdom of our children.

Our gospel story from Matthew is a tapestry of hope and of shame, of life and of death. Loader reflects:

When we, as it were, kneel upon it, we place ourselves in the story. It becomes our story. It becomes the story of the little people of Bethlehem, of the children for whom Rachel weeps, of the refugees who must flee their security, of rulers who are anxious and fear change, and of people like most of us, who are seen as wise and educated and are able to offer ourselves and our gifts. One of those gifts is to be able to lead people beyond a superficial reading of the story which becomes hung up on dates of stars and into its rich fabric and its lines of verisimilitude with what we know of Herod and what we know of today's world.²

For Those Who Have Far to Travel
An Epiphany Blessing by Jan Richardson

If you could see
the journey whole,
you might never
undertake it,
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.
Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it

only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping,
step by
single step.
There is nothing
for it
but to go,
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:
to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star
that only you
will recognize;
to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions,
beyond fatigue,
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.
There are vows
that only you
will know:
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.
Keep them, break them,
make them again;
each promise becomes
part of the path,
each choice creates

the road
that will take you
to the place
where at last
you will kneel
to offer the gift
most needed—
the gift that only you
can give—
before turning to go
home by
another way.
—Jan Richardson³

I let Mary Oliver have the last word:

No, I'd never been to this country
before.
No, I didn't know where the roads
would lead me.
No, I didn't intend to
turn back.
—Mary Oliver⁴

3

<https://paintedprayerbook.com/2011/12/31/epiphany-blessing-for-those-who-have-far-to-travel/>

⁴Mary Oliver, Evidence: Poems Published April 1st 2009 by Beacon Press (first published January 1st 2009)