



Lots of stories have gathered around the scriptures that tell of Wise Ones from the East coming to worship Jesus. Nothing in scripture says three magi, although three gifts for the child have put that number into the tradition. More likely it was a caravan of people, perhaps Zoroastrian priests (perhaps also including women) who studied the stars; as astrologers they traveled to see a great happening foretold by the stars. It is strange they stopped to see Herod, but perhaps, as people who did not know the Hebrew Scriptures, they were honoring the Hebrew tradition. The Gospel writer wants us to know that the magi were gentiles, that the Light was going out into the world for all people. When Herod hears a child is born as King of the Jews, we hear that all of Jerusalem trembled in fear wondering how he would respond.

The magi are warned in a dream to seek another route and not return to Herod. We do not read the story this Sunday, but Herod planned not to see the child; instead, he planned to kill the baby boys under two years of age in the city of Bethlehem, lest a child grow up to usurp his place. An angel intervenes again to protect Jesus, and in a dream, Joseph is warned to flee to Egypt, and with Mary and his son, they seek refuge in Egypt until it is safe for them to return to a new home in Nazareth.

Today's reading is about many possibilities in our lives. We think about our traditions of gift giving and celebration. We wonder too about others recognizing a significant event in our lives, or in the life of our child that we ourselves don't completely understand. In this short text this Sunday, we are also confronted again by power of "Empire" and the poor and the vulnerable whom God protects and sends a different kind of "King" in Jesus.

The gifts may give us a clue; we celebrate gift giving because strangers came to worship him, but I wonder what Mary and Joseph did with these gifts. Did they use the gold in gratitude for the inn keeper giving them a place to stay and for their travels? Was a little gold set aside for a place to stay and tools for Joseph and education for Jesus? Were people of need along the way shown kindness? Did the frankincense get traded along the way and a small bit saved back by Mary who wondered how Jesus might use these gifts? Was the golden teardrop shaped resin already turning red, foreshadowing the sorrow and death of a son? Was Mary herself already a healer and used the myrrh as she tended to her friends' families at times of hurt, loss and death, teaching her child as he grew the art of healing? Perhaps the gifts were wrapped in a strong hide until the new parents could ponder this mystery more?

Today I wonder about taking another road. What does it mean to see this amazing gift and have to go another way? What does it mean for us in our journeys of faith? Can we celebrate each moment knowing the Spirit guides us down paths we do not know. How are we bringing Hope into a world that might feel a little scary despite all our tools for navigation.

Speak Lord, your servant is listening. Show me the way that I might walk it with others, with strength and courage and Love in the power of your Light.

Susan+

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins,
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.