

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit. Amen/

I want to begin by reading you a quote from the priest philosopher John O'Donohue, who said this about journeys. "Classically, understanding of life, identity, and creativity was articulated through the metaphor of journeying, as in Virgil's Iliad, Homer's Odyssey, Dante's Divine Comedy. The modern life has truncated time and space. We have become marooned on each instant, and forfeited the practice of patience. Our lives are becoming abstract package tours, devoid of beauty and meaning." That's challenging stuff.

Our lives, he says, are becoming abstract package tours, and less like journeys. Today is a great day to be thinking about journeys, and to reimagine our lives as a journey, because Epiphany, which we celebrate today, is all about the journey made by the wise men, and they were men. We know that from the text. The journey that they made to see the baby Jesus. I want to suggest three things that we can learn about the way that these wise men made their journey, which might encourage us in the journey that we make in our lives.

The first thing to note about the wise men is that they were attentive. They paid attention to the star, and followed its movements. It was the star that led them to Jesus. How could we be more attentive? More attentive to the God who is made known to us in Jesus? The God called Emmanuel. God with us. The God who is close by. How do we recognize His presence in our lives, in the world around us, and in the lives of others?

How could we be more attentive to that divine presence? Do you remember that story, Elisha, in the Old Testament? The prophet who appeared to God. God said he was going to pass by. But when he came, God wasn't in the earthquake. He wasn't in the fire. He was in that still small voice. That's how God appeared to Elisha. That's how God still comes, draws near to his people by his spirit. By that still small voice. The voice we can so easily miss in the busyness that we get caught up in. We need to pay attention. Be attentive to the still small voice of the God who still longs to speak with his people.

Are we listening? How do we listen? Maybe, God's speaking through that voice coming through the words of scripture, if we pay attention to the Bible. Or, through a service. Or, through the words of a friend. Or, when we're out just walking around town, consciously trying to pay attention to the God who speaks to us. The wise men had a star to lead them. What do we have? Are we being attentive to God's voice, and his leading?

The second thing I point out about the wise men is their humility. They were open to being led to unexpected places. We don't know much about the wise men, but it would appear they were men of substance. They appear in our gospel stories to be very comfortable in the court of King Herod. They weren't intimidated. Yet, the star led them not to another palace. St. Matthew's gospel uses the word house. St. Luke talks about a stable. Either way it certainly wasn't a palace. It was a much more humble dwelling. The wise men were humble enough to be surprised. There's no record of them saying to one another, "Are you sure this is the place? A stable?" But they went straight to where the star led them, and worshiped the Christ. St. Luke places them in a cattle shed.

I want to digress for a moment, and share with you what my most vivid memory is of Christmas, this year. It was coming into church on Christmas morning. I was on my own. The place stank to high heaven. I don't know if any of you, those of you who were here, on Christmas morning, you might have, hopefully, the smell was dissipated. We opened all the windows on the doors, and let a bit of air through. I went around trying to think, "What is this smell?" I worked out what it was. On Christmas Eve, the lovely trees on the other side of the altar arrived, freshly planted in manure. I was able to tell the people who came to church on Christmas morning that not only will we be hearing a story about a baby born in a stable, we could smell the stable, too. Christmas morning at St. James was a multisensory experience. A tradition might be started, for next year. I will see.

We should all be open, and humble enough, like the wise men, to be led to unexpected places. Journeying without expected people. In fact, the wise men

themselves might be thought of to be rather unexpected people to have in this story. They were gentiles come to worship the child born king of the Jews. These were not the people who were expected at the Messiah's birth. In fact, the stable in which Jesus was born was full of unexpected people. Not just these gentiles traveling from the East. Also, shepherds. Outcasts. Poor. Not those who would be expected to be the first people to see God's Messiah born in amongst us. Unexpected people. Who are we journeying with? There's always been a temptation, in church life, and right back to the beginnings of the early church, to make our Christian pilgrimage and journey in the company of PLUs. People like us. We see that in the epistle set for today. Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus with a revolutionary message.

He says, "God's mystery has been revealed to all people. Not just the Jews, as in the Old Testament. But all God's people." Jews and gentiles were the recipients of the good news of God's coming amongst us in Christ Jesus. "All people," St. Paul says, "Need now to hear this good news. Welcome them into your Christian community." Paul's message, we know from reading the New Testament, was not always well received.

The church was split between those who wanted the church to remain PLUs, and those who saw the need to be open to all, because the good news of Jesus Christ was for all. Our journey favors to be made in the company of a wide variety of unexpected people. Not all people like us. That's why I'm so pleased that next Sunday, we're having a special Outreach Sunday, and our outreach committee has worked hard over the last year or two of nurturing deep relationships and partnerships with other groups and organizations and churches who are in a different situation to us. Next week, we'll be hearing. We'll be having a guest preacher from St. Luke's. He's going to talk about, Colin Matthewson, the Vicar there, he's going to be talking about their work, particularly, amongst the refugees, and I'll be, we're pulpit swapping. I am down there. Other organizations that the church here has strong links with will be here, and we'll, we're looking to make those partnerships real and deep, so that we don't journey alone, so that our Christian walk at St. James is not just with ourselves. But we

have a sense of walking a journey with all God's people. It's important that we develop that consciousness, and those partnerships, because as we do that, we can journey with the homeless, the poor, the refugee, and the orphan. We journey together.

The third and final thing that I'd like to say about the journey of the wise men is that this was a journey with a destination. They knew where they were going. They were following the star. They were looking for God's incarnation. His coming amongst us. What about us? Our lives aren't simply a walk in the woods. We're not just passing time. This, the first Sunday of the year, is a good Sunday to think, "Where are we headed? What's our destination?"

The wise men knew when they'd arrived. They knew when the star stopped, and their journey was ended, because they presented their gifts to the Christ child. They knew they'd arrived. They knew they'd got there. They knew their journey was at an end. What about us? How are we, this year, going to recognize when we get to our journey's end? How will we know where we've gotten to what we're aiming at? What [inaudible 00:11:03]? Where are we journeying to? We don't know what's in store for us, this year. But we can, with the wise men, make our aim to find the God made known in Jesus, and to worship Him, and to give of Him our best. That can be our end.

Three things about the way the way the wise men made their journey that we can apply to our own life. We can learn from their attentiveness, their humility, and their purpose. Let's seek to incorporate these things, in the journey of our own life.

Amen.