

Now I may I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to begin by quoting something that the priest philosopher John O'Donohue said about journeys. He said this: "Classically, understanding of life, identity, and creativity was articulated through the metaphor of journeying, Virgil's Aeneid, Homer's Odyssey, Dante's Divine Comedy. But the digital virus 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 quite meaty stuff, typical of the wonderful writings of John O'Donohue. Our lives, he says, have become abstract package tours and less like journeys. And today's a great day to be thinking about journeys, at the start of this new year, and in this season of epiphany, we think of the wise men who made that great journey to worship the baby Jesus. And I want to suggest that there are three things that we can learn from the wise men and about the way they made their journey, which might speak to us as we make the journey of our lives.

The first thing to note about the wise men is their attentiveness. They paid attention to the star, as they saw it rise in the east, and they watched it carefully, till it rested over the place where Jesus lay. They followed the star and it led them to Jesus.

How can we be more attentive? The God made known in Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us". We worship a God in this season, and all year round, but a God who has come amongst us, who is with us, who is identified with us, who has come into our world. We worship a God who is close by. How do we recognize his presence with us? How can we be more attentive to the wonder of God's presence amongst us?

Do you remember that story in the Old Testament of Elisha, when God came to him as he hid in the cleft in the mountain? Not in the thunder, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, God came to him in the still small voice. We, like the wise men, like Elisha, need to be attentive to that still small voice, the sound of silence, the way that God makes Himself known to us. That voice might come in our reading of the Bible, through the word of a friend, as we sit in

the service or maybe just as we walk on a beach. The wise man had a star to lead them, what do we have? What are we following? Are we being attentive to the God, who is close by, who longs to lead us on our journey?

The second thing I notice 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 we know that they were clearly people of substance. They seem pretty comfortable in the Royal Palace of King Herod. They're not fazed by being there. And yet the star led them not to another palace, but a much more down-market dwelling. And they were humble enough to be surprised. There's no record of them saying outside the place where Jesus lay as the star stopped, "Is this it? Are we really meant to go in here? Is this really where we've been aiming for?"

No, they were filled with joy. They went straight in and worshiped the baby lying in a cattle stall. And we too should be open to being led to unexpected places, journeying with unlikely and unexpected people. I'd like to point out at this point, that the wise men themselves could be thought of as unexpected people. They were Gentiles...Gentiles come to worship the child who was born King of the Jews, the one born to be the shepherd of God's people, Israel. And we see in that reading we just heard from St. Paul in Ephesians how much of a deal that was, how hard it was for many of the first Christians who were Jewish to accept the message, that Jesus had come to the Gentiles too, but yet here right at the beginning of Jesus's story we see and we understand the significance of these Gentile people coming to worship at the stable.

They were not people who might have been expected at the Messiah's birth. In fact, the stable in which Jesus was born, was full of unlikely visitors, not just Gentiles from a foreign country, but shepherds, who were social outcasts and misfits. It was a right bunch that worshiped Jesus that first Christmas. I've just returned from London, which is a wonderful city, a great melting pot, and one can't help on returning to La Jolla being struck by the fact that we are a rather homogeneous bunch. We have as we gather this morning in church largely very similar backgrounds and experiences.

We're alike in so many ways. And there's nothing

wrong with that, but it does mean that we need to work hard at engaging with those who are different to us, if we're to follow Jesus's example, the example he set whilst even lying in the manger gathering around him, an unlikely, unusual bunch of worshipers. And I'm delighted to see that we are making progress in this area. For instance, we've got strong links with St. Luke's and their largely Sudanese and Congolese congregation. And if you want to know more about that, there's an adult forum next week, where we'll be hearing about the work of St. Luke's.

journey of our own lives. Firstly, their attentiveness, secondly, their humility, thirdly, their sense of purpose. May we seek to incorporate these things on the journey of our own lives.

Amen.

And I've been spending quite a bit of time at the moment at the parish next door to St. Luke's called St. Mark's in City Heights, and we're thinking there about how we can develop a partnership. And I'm glad that a couple of our members were there serving lunch over Christmas, and I'm pleased too that we'll soon be hosting the Interfaith Shelter. It's great and it's a privilege to welcome people from a different life experience to us into our building. And we'll soon in this service be hearing from Deanne, who works with ECS about our longstanding links with them. And my reflections on the Christmas story this year have centered on the fact that Jesus began his life being visited by unlikely people, and he carried on surprising people with the company that he kept, and may that be a challenge to inspire us, and I hope that as a church in 2018, we might find more ways of engaging with people who are different to us.

The third and final thing about the journey of the wise men is that it was a journey with a destination. They were going somewhere. Our lives aren't just a walk in the woods. We are called for a purpose. We are to strive for a destination. The wise men knew they'd arrived; they knew their journey was over when they worshiped the Christ child. How will we know when we've arrived at our journey's destination? That's a good question to ask at the beginning of a new year, when we make resolutions, when we reflect on our aims for this year. We could think of ourselves as on a journey. Where are we heading? What are we aiming at? We don't know what's in store for us this year, but we can make it our aim to join the wise men in the worship of the God made known in Jesus Christ.

So, three things about the way the wise men made their journey that we might be able to apply to the