

St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church
Keller, Texas
Sermon for January 3, 2020 ~ Christmas 2B
The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Since the Third Century C.E., the Feast of the Epiphany has been observed on January 6. From the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance,” the feast commemorates the appearance of God to humanity in the form of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The account of the visit of the wise men or *magi* who followed the star seeking the promised Messiah has traditionally been associated with this day. It also marks the disclosure of Christ to the gentile world – that world outside the Hebrew nation.

Actually, two groups paid a visit to Bethlehem at the Savior’s birth. One group was close by, the shepherds, just down the hill from the manger. The other group, the wise men, came a long way. They followed a star from faraway Persia in a journey to the newborn King. Both the shepherds and the wise men were on a journey of faith.

The shepherds made the short trip. It was easier for them. They were prepared for the news of the Savior’s birth because they were part of the people to whom the promise of a Messiah had been given. They were expecting the promise to be kept. It wasn’t hard to convince them and they had only a few short steps to take in their journey. The shepherds didn’t care about all the theological implications that were involved. They were not concerned about the problem of relating ancient truth to modern knowledge or the historical accuracy of the scriptures.

The wise men, on the other hand, will walk out on you if you skip over those intellectual problems of faith, because they expect all journeys to be long and it doesn’t seem right to them to take short cuts. The wise men and women of faith have always been the ones who take the long way, those who come the farthest distance, and have had the more torturous trek. For them, believing isn’t easy. It takes awhile. It is a long, hard journey.

You’ll find both groups in church and synagogue, just as surely as you would have found them at the manger so long ago. It’s a fact of human intellectual and psychological make up and neither group is preferred over the other.

What is critical for each of us to remember, whether the journey of faith has been short or long, is that it isn’t how long it takes or how complicated the task of believing, but the fact that we’ve taken the journey.

You remember the popular and legendary children’s story *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy is swept up by a cyclone in Kansas and deposited in Oz. There, she is joined by those three remarkable characters in the search for the Wizard of Oz, who will answer all of their questions. The Scarecrow wants a brain. The Tin Woodsman yearns for a heart. The Cowardly Lion wants courage.

Their journey is perilous, through many obstacles, just like the wise men, but they finally come thru it all. The *way* they come through is really the point of the story. Whenever they are confronted with some sort of physical danger, it is always the Cowardly Lion who manages to fight their way out.

When the danger is more cerebral, it is the brainless Scarecrow who manages to get them out of it. And, as for the Tin Woodsman, who is journeying in search of a heart, he lends a hand whenever he can and he has so much pity and sympathy for other people that they have to gather around him all of the time with an oil can so that his tears don't rust his joints. When they finally reach the Wizard, he points out that each of them already has what they traveled so far to find.

This is where the story of *The Wizard of Oz* becomes more than a story and teaches us. Things like courage and love and wisdom come to us when we take the first step on the journey toward finding them. It is the same way with faith. Faith is not something simply handed down to us prepackaged for us to accept on the authority of some institution or even some book. Faith begins when we begin the journey! Like those characters in their journey to see the Wizard of Oz or like those Wise Men in their journey to the Christ of Bethlehem.

It is easy for people who come to faith easily and quickly to assume an attitude of righteous superiority over those who have a more difficult time of it. If you are one of those, let me remind you that nowhere in the scriptures do we find the Shepherds saying to the Wise Men, "What took you guys so long?"

At the same time, it is common to find those who have had a hard intellectual struggle in faith's journey assuming an attitude of intellectual superiority over those who have not. To you, I say, scripture does say that the Savior reveals some things to the humble and meek that he conceals from the wise. True wisdom is achieved when the intellect and the heart become friends.

All of us are sojourners, looking for a new way to believe that will guide us in a new way to live. That's the long and short of it. And, as we will see in the weeks following the Feast of the Epiphany, the manger is not the end of the journey or the end of the epiphanies.