

Dreams and Directions

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, January 8th, 2023 - Matthew 2:1-12)

I wonder how good you are at taking directions. Are you like me and either fight or second guess the GPS? During the holidays I went to Colac and had lunch with one of my mother's oldest friends. After that I decided I would drive home past the farm my grandfather owned when I was a child, it's about 20kms south of Colac in the Otway Ranges. I decided to use the GPS instead of following my instinct. So, when the GPS told me to take the road to the right when I knew I should have gone straight I followed it, I didn't trust my instincts as it had been years since I had driven out to the farm. All the way it felt wrong, but I was a believer, a believer. until I came to a place called Carlisle River which I knew was too far southwest of where I needed to be, a few gravel roads had also put some doubt in my mind. I ended up about 100kms out of my way and my trip took an extra hour or two on windy and gravel roads. From now on I will follow my intuition.

The Magi had the courage to take their directions from a star.

For thousands of years people have looked to the stars in the night sky for direction and for navigation. Astrologers look to the stars for inspiration and an understanding of the future.

These Magi were learned men from the East, Persia (*how appropriate then to have a Persian man read the bible reading in Perisan-Farsi today*), modern day Iran/Iraq, who had been studying the skies and saw something of interest or of significance. A shooting star or a comet or meteor or maybe all the planets aligned – we don't know what it was, however, it meant something to them, enough for them to pack up their bags and go on a long journey. We don't know much about these men, maybe they were astronomers, astrologists, priests or philosophers, learned enough to know that what they saw meant something and they needed to find out what. We don't even really know how many there were, we have always assumed 3 as the story has three gifts.

The star they followed though didn't just light up the sky and lead the way, it shed light on the world in another way.

I wonder what their experience was like. It was a long journey, maybe months or years, they arrive a couple of years after Jesus was born. No doubt they spent hours discussing the star and its meaning, maybe they thought about turning back, but it seems they remained curious. They begin looking in the wrong place, but completely understandable, wouldn't you expect a new king to be within the grounds of the palace? Where they frustrated by the ignorance of Herod? ¹

Given a new set of directions by Herod, they then re-orientate themselves. Then they see their star again and follow it until it rests above a humble dwelling with a young and poor family and a young child. Not what they were expecting!

¹ From Cloth for the Cradle, pp 125-126

They do what they have come to do and offer gifts and pay homage, but what were they really thinking?

And then a dream, a new set of directions. It is interesting to think about the number of times God uses dreams to communicate to his people (Joseph and his technicolor coat, Joseph as he comes to terms with impending fatherhood, Pilate's wife, and in Acts we are told old people will have visions and young people dreams). Last week I saw the stage show Joseph and his Technicolor Dream Coat and it is a song about dreams, and it has a line -any dream will do- no it won't. God needs the Magi to take note of their dream and go home another way, go miles and days out of their way home, in order to keep them safe and presumably Jesus and his family safe. This dream redirects them. The family flee after Joseph is also warned in a dream that the child's life is now endanger, so he takes his young family to Egypt to become a refugee family. Herod embarks on his rampage.

So, they journey home, no longer following their star but illuminated by what they had seen and experienced.

This weekend is Epiphany, the time when Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas, the time they acknowledge that God reveals himself to the entire world in the Christ Child. In that sense it marks the moment that God is revealed to the entire world. God's love, peace and justice is for all people, not just a select few, and it is for all time, for every place. It is for this reason that it is important for us to mark the event.

So, what are your dreams for 2023? From where will you get your directions? How will you live it out?

Whatever your dream is may you have the courage of the Magi to follow it no matter what obstacles you face. May you ignore the ridicule of others, may you withstand the pressure of others, may you put aside other things in pursuit of it. May you use your gifts and abilities in God's service, may you be transformed by the life of Jesus. May you have the flexibility to adapt to change, may you maintain your curiosity and determination. May you be transformed again and again as you encounter God in the life of Jesus, may God continue to reveal himself in all you do and in all you meet. May your experience mirror that of the Magi - 'that's the trouble with God, he does not let you leave as you come. He sends you back, stripped of your presumptions making for home by another way.'²

² Cloth for the Cradle p. 126