

Finding Home Away from Home



“JOY”

Matthew 2:1-12

Displacement in the Christmas Story

Two weeks ago we saw how Mary and Joseph had to leave home and how God met them in the manger
Last week we saw the Holy Family disrupted and fleeing to Egypt to escape scheming King Herod
Today we see the Magi leave their home in the East to follow the puzzle of a newborn king
We tell these stories to help us find hope, peace, and joy in these disorienting days of the pandemic

Matthew's Narrative Design

Writing to a Jewish audience to authenticate Jesus as the promised Messiah of the OT
Matthew simultaneously wants to show Jesus is the Messiah for ALL people, Jews and Gentiles
The inclusion of Rahab (1:5), The visit of the Magi (2:1-12)
The healing of the Canaanite Woman (15:21-28)
Use of Isaiah Prophecies concerning the Gentiles (see 4:13-16; 12:17-21; 21:43,44)
The great commission (28:18-20)

Joy

Focusing in on verse 10: superlative joy!
Distinguishing between happiness, joy, gladness, delight, well-being: the “gladsome emotions”
All emotions are a response to something
Joy as belonging to the experience of COMPLETION
Joy as a capstone, the finish, the climax, the height of human gladsome emotions
Rooted in God's VERY GOOD: Genesis 1:31
The first human joy: Adam's Response to Eve: Genesis 2:23
In the story of the Magi: Joy and Completion
The joy of completion proper (coming to the end of the long sojourn)
The joy of confirmation (the star doesn't “locate” the manger but rather “confirms”)
The joy of relief: (having lost the long project, it reappears with hope of success)
Other Scriptural examples:
The joy of finding the lost thing: Luke 15:7,9; Matthew 13:44
The man with 5 talents earning 5 more: Matthew 25:21
The joy of a mother at childbirth: John 16:21
The joy set before Jesus: the “It is Finished” of the cross: Hebrews 12:2

What Joy Can Cultivate

When things are completed, there is no longer anything to lose

Generosity: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Courage: the will to defy the edit of Herod.

Willingness to embrace the next level of growth, regardless of potential cost

See T.S. Eliot's poem *Journey of the Magi* (below)

The Pursuit of Joy?

We can't pursue it directly (it disappears like a water mirage in the desert as you approach)

Complete things! Finish what you start. Persevere into endings. Bask in conclusions.

So much joy is unexpected. Conclusions catching you by surprise.

But as Christians there is one thing we can do:

Tap into the completed work of the cross, the source of Paul's "Rejoice always" (Philippians 4: 4)

Journey of the Magi

T. S. Eliot

"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.