

Once again we've listened to the story of the wise men who came searching for a new-born king, and found him, not in a palace, but in a stable where a few farm animals were kept, an ox, a donkey, a sheep or two, - and cradled in the arms of a first-time mother and her carpenter husband, a new-born child.

It may not be what they expected, but they were willing to accept that this is what the star had led them to, and so they bowed before the mystery, and offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

I'd like to suggest that in presenting us with this story Matthew is drawing a parallel line between the journey of the Magi, and the journey we take in life, a journey that is made up of a call, a goal, and the risks that travelling an unknown and unmarked road entails.

First of all there is the call. From the moment of our birth we are called to make something of our life, a vocation to follow a vision, to reach a goal, to have a dream become reality. In practical terms that may mean the occupation we choose, - mechanic, teacher, nurse, etc. and the way we strive to make our life meaningful, - in marriage, in parenthood, in achievement. We yearn for a meaningful life, and at the heart of that yearning lies our ache for God, to find fulfilment in what totally satisfies, - in the One who totally satisfies.

To get there we have to set off on a journey, and that means taking risks, being wary of the obstacles that are there, and appreciative of the help that is also available.

Taking risks, we have to be willing to get out of our comfort zone, letting go of our security blanket, learning to trust others, to drop what may be our gung-ho attitudes or prejudices, and to grow sensitive to right and wrong.

Being wary of the obstacles that are there means recognizing the lying, sweet-talking Herods on our road, - the commercials, for example, that promise the world but are faded tomorrow, the gratification that cannot last, and the noise that drowns out our opportunity to think and take stock of where we're heading. They are obstacles, each one of them, and too many of us get side-tracked by them to the detriment of what our real goals are.

It is important, therefore, that we keep our eyes and ears open for the angel that tells us in our dreams, in our conscience, not to go back to Herod, but to go home by another way. The Magi were able to do this by remembering the child they had seen, and to which they had offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, - their possessions, their worship and their lives.

We need to do the same, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ, and on those in whom his presence may be recognised, whether they are the Saints or Magi of the past, or the Saints or Magi of the present. We are meant to reach our goal in company. It is not to be a solitary journey.