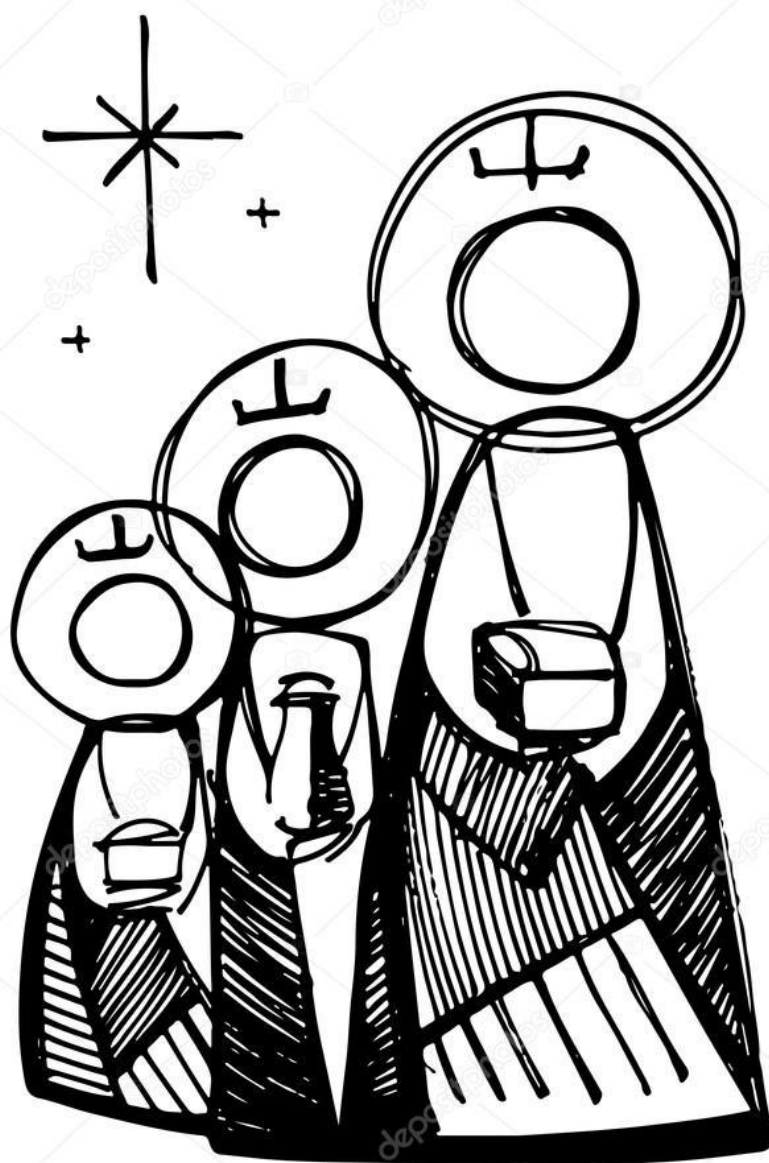


TENPENNY VILLAGES ADVENT RETREAT 2020

JOURNEYING WITH THE WISE MEN



*Ask to be awakened so that new
light may shine on the deepest
desire of your heart*

Introduction

On this Advent/Christmas retreat we will be following the journey of the wise men to Bethlehem and as they leave. It is based on a retreat published on the Sacred Space website <https://www.sacredspace.ie/> but has been adapted for our circumstances.

Rather than a normal course of Advent Bible Studies it is more of a retreat in the middle of our daily lives. It is meditation or contemplation rather than discussion and debate providing a very gently way of engaging with the story in the tradition of St Ignatius. This means that we will use our imaginations as well as our brains to follow the wise men on their journey.

The sessions will last about 30-45 minutes and we will start with a time of stillness. We will try different ways of being quiet and preparing ourselves to join in the story.

There are six sessions

SESSION 1 Sunday 29 November (Advent Sunday)

THE PATH OF DESIRE - MATTHEW 2:1-2

SESSION 2 Sunday 6 December

WE DO NOT TRAVEL ALONE - MATTHEW 2:7-9

SESSION 3 Sunday 13 December

DANGER ON THE ROAD - MATTHEW 2:1-8

SESSION 4 Wednesday 23 December

LOST IN WONDER - MATTHEW 2:9-11A

SESSION 5 Sunday 3 January

CARRYING A GIFT - MATTHEW 2:10-11A

SESSION 6 Wednesday 6 January (Epiphany)

ANOTHER WAY OF LIFE - MATTHEW 2:11-12

Each session will start at 7.30pm on Zoom

If you are unable to make a session you can just use the material in this booklet or follow it on the Sacred Space website

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/retreats/advent2015>

SESSION 1 THE PATH OF DESIRE - MATTHEW 2:1-2

Stillness

Listening to our body.

You may be sitting, standing, walking. Notice how you are in your body. Are you warm, cold? Are you comfortable, or not? Relaxed, tense? Pay attention to your feet in contact with the ground, and what they are wearing...work your way from there up to your shoulders, noticing sensations as you go...do the same with your fingers, hands, arms, up to the shoulders...often we carry tension in the shoulders...if you notice any, let some of it go...move to the head and the facial muscles...if there is tension there, let some of it go...around the eyes, the mouth, the jaw...you can let some tension go as you breathe out and imagine you are giving this to God, letting go of it into God. Is there anything your body is wanting to say to you today?

Read Matthew 2:1-2

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

In the second chapter of Matthew's gospel we are told that they had "seen his star in the East and had come to worship" a new-born king. Therefore, their journey began with a moment of wonder, with a new light shining and awakening their desire.

What star, so to speak, stirs your desire this year?

What new light invites you out of yourself? Pause and recognise that light. Let it awaken the deepest desire in this moment of your life.

Be patient with yourself as you try to pray. It may take time for the dust and the distractions to settle.

Psalm 63 - "For you my soul is thirsting. My body pines for you like a dry weary land without water".

Perhaps this desire is born from a sense of absence. You may like to reflect on what is lacking in your life right now and let it become a positive

Saint Ignatius was surprisingly insistent that towards the beginning of a period of prayer one should ask for a definite grace. What are you seeking? Turn it into a specific request.

SESSION 2 - WE DO NOT TRAVEL ALONE - MATTHEW 2:7-9

Stillness

Today, we will repeat a word to help you into stillness. Notice where you are...how you are...what is going on for you...give all that to God.

Then, ask for what you seek in this prayer...it might be to know Jesus as Lord, or perhaps something else.

Then take the Aramaic word *Maranath a*, which means 'Come, O Lord' and repeat that word as you breathe...*Marantha*. Do this for a couple of minutes...if you become distracted, simply return to the word.

Read Matthew 2:7-9

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

A traditional picture of the Magi or Wise Men shows three of them. In fact, Matthew's gospel only speaks about three gifts. What is significant is that it is a story of travelling together, no matter what the number.

It may be helpful to reflect on the many people who have crossed our path in life, and especially those who have walked with us in our faith journey.

Memory. Think of parents and family, of childhood or school friends. Who are the key people without whom your life would be totally different? Remember to re-visit the past (and the present) with the Lord, not just as a self-exploration.

Healing. If you run into painful memories, do not avoid them. To find some healing is important as part of this pilgrimage towards Christmas. Have the courage to stay and seek that freedom from the Lord.

Gratitude. In our journey with others we hope that most of our memories will be life-giving and therefore sources of wonder and thanksgiving. Offer thanks for the blessing of these contacts and how they have made you more open to God.

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SESSION 3– DANGER ON THE ROAD - MATTHEW 2:1-8

Stillness

If you are near a window, look outside. If not, still consider nature at this time of year. What kind of a day is it? What do you see or imagine? Just be present to it for a while.

Matthew 2:1-8

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”*

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’

If the Magi were being guided by a star, why did they consult people in Jerusalem and end up being interrogated by Herod? It seems that the star disappeared from view. When they left Jerusalem, the star appeared again and gave them “great joy”. This suggests a pendulum of spiritual moods, a contrast which St. Ignatius considered central for discernment, the difference between “desolation” and “consolation”.

This is a situation of spiritual danger, when deception can easily lead us astray. The invitation here is to recognise this contrast of spirits in your own life and in your times of prayer.

A small but significant point emerges here. It was when they lost contact with the true light that the Magi sought help in another and dangerous direction. St. Ignatius offers a classic piece of wisdom: never make a decision when you are in desolation.

SESSION 4 - LOST IN WONDER - MATTHEW 2:9-11A

Stillness

Have your keys to hand. Hold the key or multiple keys in your hand. Look at them. Feel the weight of them. Notice their shape, size, colour, temperature, and anything else about them.

What are they for? What associations do they have for you? How do they describe your life, responsibilities, gifts, burdens?

Hold them. Look at them. Let God look at them. And let God look at you.

Matthew 2:9-11a

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.

We come now to the climax of the journey of the Magi, to the moment when they find Jesus and worship him. They have travelled the short distance of a few miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. From Jerusalem, a place of disturbance and even of desolation and inner darkness for them. But the light of the star returned to guide them to Bethlehem. Notice again that this stage of the journey was marked by “great joy”. Bethlehem proves to be a place of simplicity and of prayer. These two places represent spiritual spaces, not just geographical locations.

Matthew does not tell us what went on in their minds in their moment of adoration, but the words he uses seem to imply a certain leap of faith by these pagan seekers. We are told that they “fell down and worshipped him” or in other translations they “knelt and adored him”. Here is a moment for pausing in prayer, asking to realise that all your desire to encounter Christ is embraced and transformed by His desire to come towards you.

Adoration is the highest form of prayer, where someone is overwhelmed by a sense of the glory and presence of God.

As you reflect at this time have the courage to simplify the gaze of your heart before this epiphany, this glory that is both veiled and unveiled.

SESSION 5 - - CARRYING A GIFT - MATTHEW 2:10-11A

Stillness

This time we will use our breathing as a way to enter into stillness today. Begin by noticing your breath, the sound of it, and the rhythm. Notice the air as it enters your body, fills your lungs, sustains your life, and then departs.

As you inhale, breathe in God's love for you...as you exhale, breathe out anything you want to share with God, or let go of, and hand over to God...take three deeper breaths doing this...

Matthew 2:10-11a

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There have been various religious interpretations of the significance of the gifts the magi brought. For instance, the Venerable Bede suggested that gold meant kingship, incense divinity, and myrrh pointed forward to the Passion of Jesus. Saint Bernard was much more down to earth suggesting that a poor family would need money; incense could disinfect the stable; and myrrh was a remedy for stomach upset in babies!

Each of the Magi brought a different gift. What do you do with what life has given you? How do you live your freedom? What is the unique gift that you have received and that only you can bring to this world?

As we journey on in life, some of the old gifts may become less present, but as we get older perhaps new gifts are born, such as a more relaxed enjoyment of people or a new kind of wisdom.

Two other horizons can deepen and enlarge our reflections on living our gifts. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10 - "You are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life". God is shaping us all the time for goodness and beauty. To reflect on your giftedness, you could adapt a famous prayer of Saint Ignatius 'Take and Receive': "You have given me all my gifts. To You I offer them all. Bless my living of them with your love and grace. That is enough for me".

Any act of goodness, however small, is a source of transformation. When we pray "Thy Kingdom come", we are asking that our efforts be part of God's great action of saving the world from evil. If everyone were to live their God-given gifts, our planet would be a different place.

SESSION 6– ANOTHER WAY OF LIFE - MATTHEW 2:11-12

Stillness

Take a look back over your day or, if it makes more sense, the last twenty-four hours...where have you been? What have you done? With whom? How did it go?

Notice where there was most life, light and energy. Notice where life drained from you.

Where was God at work in you or around you in the last day? What gifts did the day bring? Was there a nugget of gold hidden in your day? Talk to God about what you notice.

Matthew 2:11-12

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Faith needs to be counter-cultural, not in the sense of being hostile to everything modern, but rather as alert to the darkness around us

The Magi story ends with a change of direction where they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod and to depart to their own country by another way. In the light of this we can reflect on two concluding themes for our retreat: God rescuing us from evil and how discovering Christ means living differently.

Being a Christian means being changed by the encounter with Christ and often choosing to resist the dominant lifestyle. If we humans forget faith and put ourselves at the centre, then what is convenient becomes acceptable and “all else becomes relative”.

How can you embody the differentness of being a Christian? Can the horizon of our personal prayer embrace social challenges? Can it become a source, not just of individual transformation, but of an alternative way of acting in this world? As it is sometimes said, if they arrested you for being a Christian, would they find enough evidence to convict you?