

Wherever you have journeyed from tonight, you are most welcome here. Perhaps the very oddness of journeying out at Midnight may just remind us of the journeying imagery so core to the Christmas story. Mary and Joseph journeying from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered, the shepherds journeying from up on the hills down into the village to visit the babe in swaddling bands lying in a manger, as commanded by the angels, who, message delivered journey back to the skies, the Wise Men journeying from lands afar following a star. A cold coming they had of it. We too ask each other, where are you going to be for Christmas- expecting to hear of journeying by car or train, plane or ferry to family or friends with all that

uncomfortable queueing and hiatus at Christmas. We're out and about- journeying hither and yon to deliver cards and presents, shop for gifts and festive food. Journeying is part of Christmas.

But might I suggest that we miss the crucial dimension if we think only of human journeying in celebrating the birth of the Christ Child at Christmas. For it is God too- and I don't mean in a lazy, scientifically naive, 'He came down to earth from heaven' type of way, No. God too journeys at Christmas. Perhaps what all Christian theology, all talk of God is trying to say about Christmas is that God journeys unceasingly into the centre of things, the centre of the world, the centre of the human heart. We've come to call this incarnation- or as St John wrote 'the Word became flesh and dwelt

among us'. It's not about just once, not just then, not in far-off Bethlehem alone, but rather this God whom we worship, the Creator of all, constantly journeys to find a birthing place, a place to dwell, in every part of human life. God unceasingly journeys to the centre of human life with all its attendant risk and pain, never dodging the bullet. Therefore for Christians there can be no dimension of human life untouched by that presence of God- work, love, illness, betrayal, hurt, possessions, money, anger, sexuality, death, every part of human life illumined by that light which cannot be quenched or overcome.

And if Christmas focusses our thoughts on journeying through every part of our human lives, mirroring as it does the unceasing journeying of

God , incarnating himself in us, then our prayers, actions and thoughts must also at Christmas accompany those journeying as uncomfortably, as insecurely as those shepherds or wise men, as Mary and Joseph, long ago, far away . It must focus our thoughts, deeds, prayers on those journeying without security in small boats across the Channel as refugees, those fleeing persecution in Myanmar, Afghanistan or Syria. It must focus our thoughts on those for whom journeying is because of displacement through war or hunger or ecological degradation, or those journeying on our city's streets to find work, or the dignity of a place to call home.

That's why we do well to look carefully at these verses from St John's Gospel. The word became

flesh and dwelt among us- except, St John actually says, The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us. He's a journeying God, a nomadic God, who moves on, unconfined by temple, mosque or church, unceasingly journeying.

Henry Vaughan, the 17thC Welshman, put it succinctly, as perhaps behoves the poet rather than the theologian, when he wrote of the Incarnation of God in human form

He travels to be born, and then
Is born to travel more again.

Yes, exactly, for the journeying is not just one day among 365, but perhaps this Christmas does, should, must focus our lives again on the God who journeys with us every day, every moment, and

today , Christmas Day, begs us recognise this simple truth anew. And once recognised as truth, nothing can remain the same. The God who pitches his tent among us, who comes as the vulnerable child, who empties himself of everything we so value, invites us to do the same.

The God who takes human form tonight needs neither placating nor encouraging, but journeying constantly through creation, seeks to be borne through you and me, journeying with us and all humankind and in that journeying we can, we shall be changed for God is with us. Rather beautifully, Arundathi Roy, author of *The God of Small Things*, has written so fittingly for this night 'another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing'. Journey with the babe

tonight and tomorrow, hear his breathing and, in
turn, as you journey on, breathe his self-giving love
and another world will be on its way.

BL

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