

Imaginative Contemplation – We have come to do him homage



The Star of Bethlehem – Edward Burne-Jones (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say together:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit.
Amen

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds so that we too can journey with the Magi and pay homage to the Baby Jesus who, by his birth filled our world with light and hope.

Reading Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,
for out of you will come a leader
who will shepherd my people Israel'.

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward, and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

Contemplation

On this Feast of the Epiphany, we are invited to journey with the Magi and share their experience of finding the infant Jesus and paying him homage. We travel with these Wise Men not only on a journey of faith but also also a physical journey. A journey filled with highs and lows, uncertainty and revelation. Let us start our journey.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the Magi? Perhaps someone who has come to help? Perhaps one of the camels carrying the precious gifts? Or someone or something not mentioned in the passage?
- How do you feel when you see the star which heralds the birth of the King of the Jews? Excited? Full of anticipation? Do you have doubts that this is indeed the star you and your ancestors have been waiting for? The star as a sign of the birth of God's presence in the world?
- Do you have a feeling of having to set off on your journey immediately? Are you worried about the long road ahead? Are you afraid of leaving your comfort zone to journey into unknown territory?
- What provisions do you take for the long journey? Why do you choose the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to bring with you to present to this infant king?
- How long are you on the road following the star? Do you meet with dangers? Are you treated with kindness or suspicion? Do people join you part of the way? Do you tell them about your mission? Are you enjoying the long journey? Do you get to know your companions better?
- How do you feel when you lose sight of the star when you reach Jerusalem? Anxious? Unsure of where to go next? Do you have faith that it will appear again? Are you surprised that when you ask people about the star, they had neither seen it nor heard of the prophecy? Are you surprised at their lack of interest?
- How do you react when King Herod invites you to his palace to discuss the star? Do you suspect anything untoward regarding this encounter?
- How do you feel when you see the star again? How do you feel when the star comes to rest over a stable? Are you taken aback that the King of the Jews should be born in such conditions, a stable full of animals? Do you think you may be mistaken regarding the location or do you have faith in where the star came to rest?

- How do you feel when you see Mary and Joseph and the child, Jesus? What does Mary and Joseph do on your arrival? How do they greet you? What do you say to them? What is your impression of them? How long do you stay?
- What is it about the dream regarding going back on a different road that makes you rethink your journey home?
- What are you thinking about on the journey back? Do you talk about your experience or do you journey back in silence reflecting on what you have just witnessed? What is it about the scene that convinces you that this child is indeed a King?
- When you return home, what do you tell those you encounter about your journey and what you saw? How does the encounter change your life?

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation speak to Jesus about your experience. Talk to him about the star you are being asked to follow. Talk to him about the gifts you are being asked to offer him in service to his mission.

Sharing

Let us now share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
 my memory, my understanding,
 and my entire will,
 All I have and call my own.
 You have given all to me.
 To you, Lord, I return it.
 Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
 Give me only your love and your grace,
 that is enough for me.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd