

What a journey it must have been for those who first followed that star.

For they had, no doubt, risked their fortunes and their reputations to travel so far, only to have their purposes nearly foiled and their lives threatened by a paranoid ruler.

For they had traveled to see royalty and they were led to kneel before a young boy born of poor parents in a backwater town.

They must have thought about and talked about this particular journey for the rest of their lives.

They had bowed down and worshipped Jesus—the One True God.

Then, they had opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And then there was the dream, they had been warned not to go back to Herod and so they went home by another route.

What if they had ignored the dream?

What if they had gone back to Herod anyway?

Sometimes I think about how often I ignore the warnings of God or even the callings of God.

I mean, when I am faced with a moral dilemma; when I am at a crossroads where I have to make a decision about what to do; do I do it my way or God's way?

Do I take the selfish route or the easy route?

Do I give in to temptation and sin even when I know there is a different way, a better way—God's way?

Do I fail to reach out to those who could benefit from a loving reply, an empathetic ear, a box of food, some money? Perhaps because it is not convenient for me to help.

Do I cross over to the other side and keep going, so to speak, like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan?

Or do I take up my Cross and follow Christ into the uncomfortable, the difficult, the risky, the costly?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in “The Cost of Discipleship” writes: “Costly grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a person their life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered Him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”

The Incarnation of God, is, of course, God becoming One of Us.

God experiencing our sorrows, our difficulties, our temptations.

God going to the Cross and dying the death we deserve in order to save us.

That is costly grace—it Cost God Everything to save us.

But God wouldn't have had it any other way for God so loved the world.

Is there anything more beautiful?

Is there anything that sparks more hope in our hearts than this?

Even though the past year was so dark, and even though we continue into 2021 in the same darkness, there is hope.

There is a reason to rejoice.

There is a reason to get up in the morning.

For God loves us and is present in our lives.

And this reminds me of another quote from Bonhoeffer:
“God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. Those [we might] find repulsive, those [we might] shrink back from with pain and hostility. This is for God the ground of unfathomable love.”

And so, when we look upon other humans, no matter who they are, no matter what they are doing, no matter how

obnoxious they may act; can we remember how much God loves them?

And if so, can we learn to love them as well?

And if we, perhaps, look upon ourselves and find things that are repulsive and disgusting and painful and hostile to God; can we learn to love ourselves despite these things just because, God love us despite these things?

God's grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

And in following Jesus Christ we find life.

We find meaning.

We find love. Love for God, love for self, love for others.

We find out who we are and Whose we are.

And we become Who we are ultimately meant to be.

And so, I find myself thinking of those wise men, those magi, who traveled nearly two years after they first saw the star, and I find myself wondering about what stirred in their hearts to cause them to risk so much.

Did they know that whatever it cost them to follow God's call it would be worth it?

Did they know, or somewhere along the journey were they tempted to give up?

Did one of them ever say, "Hey guys, I am going home, this isn't worth it, I'm tired, I want my old life back"?

Or perhaps, there were more than the ones who finally made it to Bethlehem when this all started.

Maybe there were a lot more, but only these guys stuck with it the entire journey.

Perhaps there had been many but only these met Christ.

In any case, it cost them a lot to complete what they had set out to do.

It cost them a lot of time.

Hadn't they missed their friends and family back home?

What deep yearning for something other than what they had known led them to travel so far?

And as I think of them, I find myself thinking of all of us.

What journey have you been on in order to come, kneel down and worship Christ?

What have you given up?

What sign in the sky, what communication from God, made you go that deep, that far to discover its meaning for you?

What did you sell off in order to be able to take up your cross and follow Jesus?

Was it an old habit that you loved?

Was it a way of life or a pattern of existence?

What was it?

And are you still selling it off?

Are you still trying to get rid of it?

Does it keep haunting you and calling your name saying:
“Come back. This journey you are on isn’t worth it. Don’t
you miss me? Remember how much fun we had?
Remember how much easier it was with me?”

And then it strikes me that those travelers to Bethlehem
were simply living their lives to their natural conclusions.

For apparently their life's work was studying the stars.

And when they saw a star which seemed to hold such
meaning, all they could do, if they were to be true to who
they were called to be, was to follow its direction.

So, having studied the stars and having felt the nudging of
one particular star to take this incredible journey, when
they came to the place to which the star led them, they
were met there by God.

We know this could not have been at all what they
expected or at least not God in the form and circumstance
that they found Him.

He was in the company of mere peasants living in a
humble shack in Bethlehem.

He was just a dirty little toddler.

They easily could have rejected this God.

They could have said, “This is ridiculous.

I am not bowing down to someone who looks to be so beneath me. I am not wasting my precious gifts on the likes of Him. He will never amount to anything. Surely, I am too good for all this. I choose to keep my gold, frankincense, my myrrh. The cost is too much."

Still, in that toddler, they met the "Holy One," God's Own Son.

And all they were doing was what they were created to do, whether they realized it or not.

And yet, at the same time, this was probably more than what they bargained for when they first started out. Packing up to travel to far flung places was probably not in the job descriptions they first accepted.

And yet, what they set out on, and in what they experienced and through this journey, there was a whole lot more for them now than sitting in a quiet, familiar place, taking notes on parchment and sharing their insights with others.

Perhaps this is the way it is for all of us.

As we use and develop the gifts that God has planted within us, as we become all we were made to be, with eyes and hearts open, perhaps we, too, encounter God there as well if we are willing, if we say "Yes" to God's call.

If we are willing there will be a point when we follow God's leading out of our most comfortable places in order that we might encounter the Holy One as well.

And it could be that it might not look like we thought it would, but it is so much better than we could have ever dreamed.

And so for those who teach, and those who listen, and those who visit, and those who build, and those who nurture children, and those who clean, and those who invent and those who heal and those who....well, you fill in the blank.

Maybe like those magi from so long ago, our first calling is simply be who we are.

And then to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to when we are called to step out in faith, somehow taking those gifts of God to their natural conclusions.

Those times will come to us all, that's guaranteed.

Will we take the journey?

Will we keep on, even when the temptation is to turn back?

Will we give all we have to worship and follow the God who loves us so much?

If we will it is certain that our lives will never be the same again.

That's the way it was for the magi.

That is the way it can be for you and for me.

There is a light shining in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome it.

Let us all follow God, let us follow the star, wherever it may take us.

Let us pray.