

<Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; John 1:10-18>

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Christ-child, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go!

How far did you travel for the holiday season? How far did you travel to visit with family or friends, or to spend Christmas together? For some, it may have been a matter of a few miles, or no miles at all if people came to you. For others, it may have been to another neighboring state, though I know there are some from our congregation who came up from Florida to be with family in this time.

Or how about today, to travel to church? My guess would be, "not that far." It's relatively easy for us to get from home here to church these days, and compared to many other cities, Buffalo and the surrounding area is very easy to navigate.

In this Christmas season, as we approach Epiphany and the guiding of the star for the magi, whom we also recognize during today's worship, my mind naturally drifts toward holiday travel, and thoughts of what might be encountered along the way.

Most recently, I think of trips made from Virginia to make it back here to Western New York, or Elmira, to connect with family. Frequently we would wake up first thing on Christmas morning, with the car already packed, and we would pull out of the driveway before the sun was even up, making our way north. Ironically, making that drive on Christmas Day was actually the quickest, as it had the least amount of traffic on the road, even when driving around Washington, D.C. Usually, the main question was when and where we might stop to stretch our legs and refuel the sleigh, and whether or not our intended stop was open on Christmas Day. Largely, the travel was not that difficult, except for the one year we thought to leave right after the eleven o'clock service and drive through the night; that was, of course, the year there was heavy snow throughout the entirety of Pennsylvania, which is already a long state to drive through in the best of weather.

How far did you travel, in this holiday season?

I think of the magi, even though our particular Scripture readings this morning do not focus on their story. In order to make the trip we imagine that they did, it would have taken months, if not more than a year, to reach Bethlehem from where they started. And if they were to find the child Jesus there, then the star would have appeared to them long before the birth, perhaps even as early as the time the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced what was to come. It is not outside the realm of theological imagination to think of the guiding star appearing about the same time Mary proclaims, from Luke's recounting, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

And in this journey of the magi, over rivers and through woods, and along roads and perhaps through fields, their faith, their belief that they might find what their hearts yearned to discover kept them going, day in and day out. Eventually, through this star, God brought them to the place where God dwelt.

It is easy to ponder, at the tail end of this Christmas season and on the verge of Epiphany, how far we travel in the various stages and journeys of our lives, and what we encounter. Each of us

has a travel-related story, and often the ones we tell most readily are the ones which include travel plans which did not go according to plan, and the various obstacles and hurdles which had to be overcome in order to reach our destinations.

Do you realize that, regardless of what your travel plans were this holiday season, or how far you actually had to drive to get to church this morning, that you have actually traveled cosmically far to come to this worship gathering today?

Your spirit, your person, has traveled years and light years to be here this morning, here and now. This is no small feat, and nothing to be dismissed or lightly overlooked. And yet, for all of our travel, there is another question to consider: Do we realize the lengths to which God has traveled to come into our lives, and the fullness of all that that entails?

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth."

The Word...in Greek, *logos*, which means more than just "word." *Logos* also refers to reason and purpose. And in our Christian understanding, it represents not just purpose in general, but the Divine purpose and will for all of creation. It is the fullness of God's vision and imagination for all that has been created, and the relationship it has been created for, including us.

God has traveled into the fullness of the created order, and in particular into the fullness of humanity, to come alongside us and show us the way to travel back to God. The Word became flesh; Light from Light, God incarnate filled with grace and truth.

And when the reality of this movement is paired with the vision proclaimed in Jeremiah, a comfort and reminder to the people of what will come after the hardships of exile and loneliness, it is indeed a cause for celebration. And what a celebratory feast it will be! Gathered to this Table will be peoples "from the land of the north and...from the farthest parts of the earth." But even then, it will be more than just geographic distance which is overcome. Any and all inhibitors will be overcome and cast aside, as well; no more will there be anything that stands between God and one who desires to come to God. "...the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor together; a great company, they shall return here," proclaims Jeremiah.

God has travelled great distances and lengths to come to be with us, and God will call all peoples together to sit at Table and rejoice in one another's presence. A feast will be set and the Table will be expansive; it will contain the very fullness of God. This is not just a grand get-together, this is a profound movement toward *knowing and being known*, of being connected and seen.

This is the celebratory feast that is prepared on such an occasion, and that is the feast which is prepared again for us today, in this season. It may seem that we travel only a few feet to come to this Table in this time of worship, but we have crossed time and space to be here, with a God who has travelled across not only time but has entered into the fullness of human nature to gather with us, and to gather all peoples to His table.

So let us gather again, in the presence of one another and in the presence of the Word made flesh, celebrating what is, and living into what is now possible to be. And in this, let us celebrate. Amen.