

Detour!

Isaiah 60¹⁻⁶; Psalm 72¹⁰⁻¹⁵; Ephesians 3¹⁻¹²; Matthew 2¹⁻¹²

*In accordance with the eternal purpose that [God] has carried out in Christ Jesus.
[Ephesians 3¹¹]*

I am heartened by the fact that Magi needed a little prompt along their way to worship the infant Jesus.

These astrologers had read the stars (rather than following a moving star – as they don't usually move at the speed of a camel and if it did it would need a miracle, almost on the magnitude of creation itself, for all the planets to stay where they were with a star, a sun, moving) and they ended up taking a detour and visiting Herod instead of arriving in Bethlehem.

I was looking back to the sermon for Epiphany last year where I set out a vision for the year: how could we ever have predicted that 2020 would have taken all the unexpected turns that it did. Those plans had to take a detour.

- ✘ We have learned how to use technology – whether at home, or using a phone or (thanks to Adam, who has been a star) the complex technology that we now have. Through that technology we have reached many more people and have an national and international community that is St Mary's – I don't suppose that those 'tuning-in' imagined that you would be sharing with us today.
- ✘ Last year I challenged people to use their gifts in God's service and we imagined that this would be in the Church. In this year many have been able to use their gifts for the Church rather than in it. There hasn't been a lot of high-profile activity, but people have used their gifts to ensure that the fellowship are in touch with each other, have what they need and are supported.
- ✘ We did say last year that we should see giving as a spiritual privilege rather than a burden. That remains a challenge for us.

- ✘ Worship, that is offering the best to God, has had to be rethought as we could not be together as often as we might and then when we can be together, we cannot sing. We have had to be creative and have had to learn that God is with us and we can worship him without the scaffolding that may have become over dependent on.
- ✘ When we talked about Myrrh last year as a reminder of death we could not have imaged that there would not be a family untouched by the shadow of Covid 19 and that our nation would become preoccupied with statistics relating to disease and death. Yet, it has been our privilege in the name of God, to get alongside those who mourn and to offer hope.

Was the detour that was 2020 a waste of time? Did we fail to fulfil the vision set out 12 months ago? It could feel as good as the detour to Herod that led to the slaughter of the innocents – but it was more positive than that.

What I do know is that God hasn't let us down: he has been faithful. As we look forward to 2021 there are few that are brave enough to predict what will happen or to share a clear vision of what we want to achieve. All I know is that God will continue to be faithful! Our challenge is to be as faithful to God as he is to us.

A blessing by St. Thomas à Beckett, who knew about uncertainty:

*May God make your year a happy one!
Not by shielding you from all sorrows and pain,
But by strengthening you to bear it, as it comes;
Not by making your path easy,
But by making you sturdy to travel any path;
Not by taking hardships from you,
But by taking fear from your heart;
Not by granting you unbroken sunshine,
But by keeping your face bright, even in the shadows;
Not by making your life always pleasant,
But by showing you when people and their causes need you the most,
And by making you anxious to be there to help.
God's love, peace, hope, and joy to you for the year ahead!*

There is no better way forward!