

Epiphany 2011

On the way home, did they wonder?

So many times in life, do you find? Things that astound you....moments of wonder....things that sneak up and take your breath away....

They happen, and there you are in the moment and then later, you think.....
you think of things you might have said; questions the you could have asked; details you should have captured in your heart, but even now are fading into the slant and shadowed light of memory.....

On the way home, did they wonder? They were travelling a different road, that's certain. And the road was long. A long, and winding road, that would lead them to their door

When they were travelling to get to Judah, they had so much to think about; talk about; a different kind of wondering. They had prepared the gifts, checked and double checked the charts of the heavens....and they wondered: Was this truly it? Had the skies spoken so clearly? And of all the eyes of all the scientists in all of history, had theirs truly been the ones to witness and follow the light that would lead them to the promised one?

Yes, they decided. Again and again they consulted the heavens. Yes. It was true.

But nothing had prepared them for what happened when they got to Judah. Looking for the promised one, for a King, they went – obviously – to the palace.

The reception there had beenless than stellar.
Disquieting, at first, then disturbing
and then came the bone chilling certainty that the man was mad.

“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” they had asked. The servants, unable to cover their shock andfear....ran to deliver the message. They came back too quickly than protocol dictated, and with lowered eyes, invited them in.

There had been something....off. And they wondered....was this a mistake?

Oh there had been the elaborate hospitality, as was the custom. Servants aplenty to feed and water the animals. Other servants to wash their feet in oiled and scented water. There had been exotic food, and the required, painfully sustained small talk...until finally, Herod's hard and vacant eyes focused on them.

They told him what they knew....

Outside, a small scream in the evening air – and a hawk took to the lavender skies with a small, struggling rodent in its talons.

Inside, Herod flexed his fingers, making of them a tent, resting it upon his ample belly. *“Tell me”* he said, sucking on his yellow teeth, *“Go and search for this child, and when you have found him, bring me word, so that I may go and worship him”*.

They hadn't wondered anymore; not about that. Thanking Herod for the hospitality, and accepting the food for the journey that he pressed upon them, they left the palace. Outside they breathed deeply as if for the first time. At what they thought might be a safe distance from the palace, they gave away the food he had insisted they accept. The bread they had eaten at his table ; rich, heavy with expensive spices and fruits, lay heavy inside them; and for all its fine ingredients, seemed to give no nourishment but rather slowed their steps and soured their bellies. The ravens at the side of the road, however, seemed to enjoy it very much.

It was evening before the star was visible again. They walked deliberately in the other direction, and for several more days, until they were certain Herod's spies and the gawking townsfolk had given up watching them every minute.

On the way home, they wondered – had the deception been enough? And the warning they had tried to impress upon the the little family – had *that* been enough? *“If you ever need a place of safety”* they had said quietly, to the man, *“here are some names of friends of ours in Egypt. They will welcome you.”*

One thing, however, that they never *ever* wonder about, was the reality of what they felt when, knocking at the door of a simple home, they were welcomed by a woman with a child in her arms. They knew it, in the dark cave of themselves; where the truth lies hibernating until something primal and springlike melts and awakens it, and starving, it gropes toward the light.

The child squealed when he saw them, and reached out chubby arms – and from within them something leapt and squealed in response. Deep calling to deep. They knew.

They did NOT wonder at the hospitality so simple, so graciously offered. Plain water for their feet. Crumbly barley bread made from nothing more than rough grain and water. Wine, shared in the traditional way: a common bowl in the centre of the table. The young woman broke the loaf, and they passed it from hand to hand, dipping the bread in the bowl. Had it been the wine – that they were warmed so completely inside? That their vision became ...softer, more clear and yet porous. They could have sworn they saw things, and people, at that table they knew they would never mention outside. The paupers' bread and ordinary wine filled them in a way that the rich, greasy bread stuffed into their satchels by Herod's servants could never do.

The conversation was stilted, tentative. In part, shyness. In part, difference in language. But mostly, while they talked with one another, their eyes and hearts were drawn to the child, as plants to the sun. The entire meal seemed centred on him; this child just learning to walk; half crawling, half stumbling among them, speaking a language all his own, as babies do. His little form cast strange shadows in the lamplight as he moved. They did not wonder – they knew they had followed the star well.

On the way home, they wondered what that little family would do with the gifts that in the end had seemed – out of place in a simple carpenter's home. Would they be vulnerable to thieves....because clearly, in spite of their best efforts at concealment, the whole town knew they had been there.

They wondered what would become of that child of whom the prophets had sung, and whom the skies celebrate? What would his life bring, and in what way would he become the king he was born to be?

The wondered what their own lives would have been without this journey – and if anyone would ever hear about it.....

And they wondered if, in times to come, after this child had changed the world as he had changed their lives so simply, so beautifully by being exactly who he was....they wondered if there would be others who would risk everything for love; who would leave things behind to follow the star that would shine in their own world; in their own lives and guide them to the truth and they wondered if anyone would ever have the blessing of sharing bread and wine around a table of love and trust as they had in Bethlehem, house of bread, with that child in their midst bringing joy.