**December 2002 *Journeying, Advent, Christmas***

Welcome to the December Prayer, and the fourth in a series of 12. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction**

As the month of December unfolds, we are taken on a journey with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. Any journey, however short or long has a starting point, an arrival, and a return, although this may not be in the same day. Even when we do not leave our own home, we still make a journey through the hours, and experiences, of the day. The theme of our prayer is an inward, and perhaps outwards, journey; a prayer walk.

Whenever we venture out of our homes, we usually go back home at the end of our journeys. There is the pattern of going back and forth - to work, to school to the shops, to make a visit to friends or relatives. Although we usually return to the same place at the end of each day, we return to the starting place of the journey with all the experiences and events that have happened along the way. For example, it may be that we are full of energy in the morning, but perhaps tired by the time we return at the end of the day, or we are excited at a new challenge being accomplished.

Sometimes we may not realise this but every journey to make is a new experience. However short or long, difficult or simple the journey is, we will discover a little about ourselves, and perhaps about God as well.

**Prayer**

 Be my Companion,

beside me each day

so I do not stumble

when the way is hard,

and to rejoice with me

when the path is easy.

Come, Companion on my way,

be with me as I navigate

the journey of my life.

Amen.

**Reflection**

These weeks of December make up the season of Advent, which means ‘come’ or ‘coming’ and for Christians it is the coming of Jesus that we wait for as we journey towards his birth. In church services we journey through stories from the Old Testament which tell us of how the people followed God, or went their own way, and we hear echoes of Gods promise that a Son will be born.

Our journey continues into the New Testament as that promise is fulfilled and all people can come to know God’s love. There are lots of stories and smaller journeys to be discovered which reveal the bigger picture of a journey through life that we can read about in the bible, and this also applies to our own personal life walk. This is a journey that we may at time travel alone, but often share with others, family and friends, and strangers we meet along the way; through them we can discover more about ourself and our faith.

**Bible Passage**

The bible reading is from the gospel of Luke 1:39-41a; 2:4-5(7) and tells us of two different journeys. The first is Mary on a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, and the second when Mary and Joseph have to go to Bethlehem where Jesus is born.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

 *Is there a special journey you have made that filled you with love and joy?*

*How does it feel to remember it?*

**Reflection**

The first reading tells us part of the story of Mary and her visit to Elizabeth. Mary has been surprised by the angel Gabriel and has said her ‘Yes’ to God [Luke 1: 26-38] and so becomes the God-bearer. Elizabeth is also pregnant, and when they meet her baby leaps in the womb, acknowledging the Son of God in Mary.

Mary’s visit to Elizabeth helps us to understand that some of the journeys we make and the experiences we have in our lives, including our spiritual experiences, are sometimes beyond words to describe them. If we do try to put it into words then they may not fully say what we actually experienced; the experience was felt within and speaking of our feelings can be difficult.

When we come to the second passage and the arrival in Bethlehem, we need to remember that this isn’t the end of the journey. The story and the journey is an ongoing one for Mary and Joseph, and for Jesus. How often have you discovered that what you thought was the end of the journey is actually just a pause as it leads straight into the beginning of a new one; and a journey that may have many potential and unexpected directions and diversions!

We don't need to understand every step we take or for us to be absolutely certain of the journey we are taking. Who hasn't asked for directions along the way? Getting lost can be a part of the journey! In life and in faith, we sometimes have to rely on other people's directions and advice in order to get to where we are wanting to go. We look to them because of their understanding and their experience.

 *Who would you turn to for help and support on life’s journey?*

 *Who would you turn to for help and support on the journey of prayer and faith?*

There are times of course, when we do not return to our starting point. This may be a move to another part of the country, when age or ill-health requires full-time care, when disaster strikes forcing people out of their homes. Journeys can be unexpected and unwanted.

 *Is this something you, or someone you know has experienced?*

As we look back at the diversity of journeys that have taken place in our lives, we discover that alongside the physical journey there is also the inward journey; our minds, thoughts, feelings have also journeyed with us and making us into the person we are at this particular moment. Prayer and faith may also have been a part of that journey. If it has, consider how that has changed you over the years, or your way of approaching prayer is now different. Prayer too, is a journey of discovery through pathways of doubt, of questioning, or seeking, of realising, of seeds of faith growing over time, of reaching out, of being amongst others walking the same path.

*How will you journey through these weeks of Advent – what does this mean to you?*

*How will you celebrate the Christmas and the coming of Jesus – what does this mean to you?*

**Prayer of the Month: Going on a Prayer Walk**

A prayer walk can take us outside in and around our local area, in the countryside, along a beach, in a church, and it can also be from the comfort of your own home. It is to lift to God, silently in our hearts, all that is noticed and seen and all that is unseen.

There is no right or wrong way of praying on a prayer walk, and so it maybe that the prayer is one of remembering a connection to your own story and journey of life, it may be to pause and wonder at the beauty of creation, or to ask God to be with those we see and places we walk past. Wherever we walk God is with us, and it’s also to be ready to be surprised at where our prayer takes us.

***Praying and Walking***

Decide where your walk will be.

Slowly walk and as you do look around you, and for example pray for:

 People living in the houses – for peace and health

 Schoolchildren and teachers in a school – for patience and learning

 Those working in shops, offices or factories – for enjoyment in work and fair pay

 Open spaces and parkland – for its beauty and sense of well-being

Be aware of the weather and any scents on the air.

Look at different shapes and colours.

Be aware of different textures you can feel and touch.

Consider where God is and what God may be saying to you.

At the end of the walk, give thanks to God for all that has been seen and experienced and all that has been felt within.

***A Prayer ‘Walk’ from a Chair***

This ‘walk’ could be looking out from a window, and as with an actual walk, offer prayer for all that can be seen, for places you know are nearby, for friends and neighbours. Let your imagination take you on a journey of prayer with God.

This ‘walk’ could also be around your home as a way of remembering special moments in your life, and the stories each room has for you. Again, let God be your guide in this time of prayer.

***Afterwards***

Spend a little time to reflect upon your walk wherever that has been, and it may be helpful to note down anything that seemed important to you.

What have you discovered about the area of your walk?

What have you discovered about yourself?

Did anything surprise you on this prayerful walk?

Will you pray in this way again?

Offer a prayer of thanks to God.

**Prayer**

As I journey through this month,

thank you, O God, for people in my life,

those who I can turn to,

those who support me,

those who help me to see things truthfully.

When the journey has been difficult

help me learn from those experiences.

When the way has been easy

help me not to be complacent.

As the journey continues,

walk with me, day by day.

Amen.

**Something to Explore**

Search for ‘*The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre’* by Eugene Bernand.

Search for *‘O Sing a Song of Bethlehem’* by Louis F Benson.

Look for by *‘Pererin wyf mewn anial dir’* William Williams.

**Suggested reading**

*The Way Under Our Feet: A Spirituality of Walking* by Graham B Usher

Search for ‘*Footsteps in the Sand’*

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme and prayers will be around inclusion, the new year, and praying for others; the prayer of intercession.