

The Journey Of The Magi
by T.S. Eliot

*A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sorefooted,
refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the
terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and
grumbling
and running away, and wanting their
liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the
lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns
unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high
prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all
night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears,
saying
That this was all folly.*

*Then at dawn we came down to a
temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of
vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-*

*mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away
in the meadow.*

*Then we came to a tavern with vine-
leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for
pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so
we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment
too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might
say) satisfactory.*

*All this was a long time ago, I
remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth,
certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had
seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this
Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like
Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these
Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old
dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their
gods.
I should be glad of another death.*



Eliot holds life and death in a rather dizzying tension. Like us as we begin 2020, Jesus had it all before Him. We of course know the story ahead for Jesus. But Eliot doesn't permit us just to *know* the story he disturbs us to be caught by these events and what will come out of them. Caught. Entangled. Like fish on a hook or thread carried through a weave.

All this could sound very negative. And there is an unease in the air as Eliot finishes. There's unease in parts of the Gospel account too.

But being disturbed and entangled by this story is not actually a negative thing. It is in fact the invitation to life. So much in our part of the world, in our time, tells us that our humanity is at its best when we are self-reliant, complete and insulated from need or doubt or 'other'. Even our faith – like everything else in life (we are told) needs to exist in tidy, sorted boxes. Clean, neat and presentable.

The vision sketched out for us by the Christian Good News is completely the opposite of this. God shows us this Himself. Christ doesn't come among us as a handsome, rich, clever, able leader. He's a baby. Babies need more love than they can give; they need protection and feeding and changing and cherishing.

God entangles Himself in our story in this humble messy way, that we might freely entangle ourselves in His story. It is actually in our entanglement, in our inter-dependence, in

our *weakness*, in our belonging not our independence (from each other and from God) that we discover what it means to be fully human. Entanglement is a good thing then, that unsettling tension between death and life that Eliot's wise men find themselves in is a place of life so much more *real* than their formerly comfy palaces.

This is an invitation to us too. To allow ourselves to be threads entangled in the weave of this greater story, this tapestry of life God, me, us. As CS Lewis wrote towards the end of Narnia's Last Battle: "'Yes,' said Queen Lucy. 'In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.'"

This year our stories continue as they do in life, entangled with each other: colleagues, family, friends, neighbours, school mates and God seeking to be becoming fully human together.

This is an exciting journey to be on together. There may not be any camels, thank goodness there are no 'silken girls bringing sherbert', but it is still a journey and there is a priceless treasure to be revealed.

It's good to be here at the gate of the year together. Draw near with faith and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, this gateway each week to the death and life at the heart of life's story.