

SMOOTH SEASONAL TRAVELING

TRAVELING AT CHRISTMASTIME brings something other than visions of sugarplums to many people. Increasingly over the years, holiday travel conjures up images of flight delays or cancellations, long lines at security checkpoints, snippy airline personnel, and families pushed to their limits. And this year marks a time when airline ticket prices are at an all-time high, and customer service seems at an all-time low. Traffic on the highways is another issue altogether.

What's to blame? Many analysts chalk it up to the rising price of oil and the falling value of the dollar. Higher gas prices have not only upped airline ticket prices, but they've also forced many to consider driving, rather than flying, to their holiday destinations.

During December, there are always news reports about folks sent on detours they hadn't expected to make. Everyone from airline officials to those who conduct seminars on "air anxiety relief" offer their advice. One source quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor* said, "What we do is ask people to find a memory where they have a profound connection with another person, and to associate each aspect of the flight experience with that memory" (October 17, 2007).

OK, good idea. But how about remembering some other journeys often portrayed at this time of year?-like the one Joseph and Mary took on the road to Bethlehem, or the one made by the wise men as they followed the star.

One reason why I remember those journeys is because I inevitably ended up in school plays portraying some manger animal in the nativity scene. But those Bible travel stories nonetheless had significance for me. First, I thought about what it would have been like to travel on a donkey or a camel. Then, as time went on, I thought more about why those folks were traveling in the first place and what their expectancy was.

You might say that their travel was part of a mission-not so much about getting to Bethlehem as it was what they expected to see. Mary and Joseph, as well as the wise men, were filled with great expectation-the promise of seeing the Messiah or Christ child.

I like to imagine how that joyful anticipation would have affected their spirits as they traveled. No doubt the expectancy

of finally seeing that spiritual promise of prophecy fulfilled pretty much negated the hardships of such a journey in those days-the inconvenience of having to go to some unfamiliar place, traveling in less than ideal weather and on modes of transportation that were at best noncompliant, and ending up in accommodations that weren't probably what they would have liked.

So this becomes an ideal time to ask ourselves whether we couldn't travel this season with a similar, prayer-based, expectancy of good. Couldn't we watch to make sure that our journeys are not so much defined by where we are going as by the spirit in which we undertake them? Expecting to see the Christ in every travel experience, we can develop a heightened awareness of the healing presence of divine Love. And this is the Love that soothes surly agents, comforts disgruntled children (and exhausted parents), and brings order rather than chaos to flight schedules.

When we travel in this way-spiritually prepared and trusting-we can expect to see the manifestation of God meeting the human need, destroying the misleading images and allurements of everyday experience. After all, the prophecy regarding the appearance of the Christ in human experience was that "of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33), and "the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9:6). Why shouldn't that promise be seen in every detail of our experience, in every detail of our journeys?

I've spent a good deal of my life traveling. Once a good friend and mentor asked me, "Are you going to 'bring the Christ' to all these locations you're visiting?" I thought that was probably a trick question, so I took time to think about it, rather than answer too hastily. That helped me grasp the point being made. It wasn't my task to bring the Christ to anyone. It was my privilege to recognize the Christ as present in whomever I met and wherever I went. That probe beneath the surface of things would help bring healing into my travel experiences.

And it has. Such attitudes of thought are ideal travel companions. They can smooth the way for many happy and successful journeys-no matter what the destination, or what time of year. **ICU**

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