

## Pasada, Pilgrimage and perseverance – some thought for Advent Sunday 2020

In the beginning...there was light....and God said the light was good.

Through Advent - We travel **with** the light of Christ. We travel **by** the light of Christ. We travel **to** the light of Christ.

Travelling out and about at this time of the year can be tricky. Here in Cumbria in November, at best it can be drizzly and cold; at worst it is snowing and frosty and then the roads are a worrying, 'dodge the sliding truck' up Dunmail or slip down behind a bus on Bannerigg. In the dark this can be very scary.

Today we rarely travel without some powerful light. This was not the case in times past. Little more than a hundred years ago, even in this country, travelling in the dark was a dangerous undertaking.

But the metaphor of **travelling** and **our need for light** are important themes for Christians at this time.

Our readings tell us that right from the beginning of creation...light is within the will of God and that it is good. Just as light for the physical world is pivotal for things to grow and flourish so light for spiritual life makes all the difference in the world.

Isaiah echoes this....those words of breathless joy... 'the people who walked in darkness and have seen a great light'. That never again do we have travel in ignorance. The light who has come into this world. 'Unto us a child is born' who is ...'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

So as Christians we believe when we travel **with** the knowledge of the light of Jesus.

We also travel **by** the light of Jesus. We do not make this journey through this world groping around in the dark. We have been given a light showing us the way, picking out the pitfalls, keeping us from harm. This light shines from the lamp and the face that is wonderfully depicted in Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World'.

In Advent we also travel **to** the light

We travel towards the celebration of Jesus' birth.

In Latin America they do this in the form of a communal journey. There is a tradition of two people from the village being chosen to represent Mary and Joseph. They are dressed as the young couple and travel from home to home telling all they meet about the imminent coming of Jesus. It is called Posada. It is a Spanish word meaning 'inn'. On Christmas Eve the whole community gather round the couple and take part in a play of the first Christmas. It is a way of the people of the village remembering the story, its hardships and challenges on the way to the celebration of Jesus' arrival at Christmas.

Travelling for the first young couple was a story full of hardships and uncertainty. Finding a place to rest along the way, the issues of journeying when Mary is heavily pregnant, the threat of living under foreign occupation...the list is long and harrowing.

Many of us are frustrated by our inability to travel physically during these present dark times. However many have found it a time when we can't travel around and we have been inspired to travel inwards; to travel as pilgrims on a spiritual journey to discover more about God and ourselves. Even for Mary and Joseph the journey was part of the point. It was part of the preparation, part of what bonded them, part of the coming to realize, when they looked back on it, that this message of love in human form was worth every minute of waiting and every hardship of the journey. Also that he was not going to be accepted with open arms, was going to be born amidst real struggling life in all its rawness and was utterly different from what they had experienced before.

The echoes for our own spiritual journey to the point where Jesus is there before us in the crib at Christmas will require special perseverance this year. It will be tough. It will be uncertain. We are going to have to keep going on going on – sometimes beyond what we think we can endure. We will travel in a deeper way with Mary and Joseph but with one difference. We know Jesus will come. Light will be welcomed into the world. We know it will be alright in the end.

With the Christian spiritual journey, our inner pilgrimage this Advent we travel **with** Jesus, **by** his light and **to** him.

Later in this service we will light the first candle on the Advent ring. A little light in the darkness of the church on a dull day. I invite you to light your own candle at that point as a sign of our journey through this extraordinary Advent to the light of Christ at Christmas time. You may like to light one each Sunday – whether we are in church or on zoom – to remind ourselves – to travel with Jesus, by the light of Jesus, to Jesus this Advent.

So let's pray.....