

November 05

As daylight hours shrink and the nights grow longer in our northern hemisphere, we are unmistakably on our winter journeys. In the Christian tradition, we are soon to hear the winged creatures sing again, see unusual stars in the night sky and find young parents in search of shelter. The shepherds will don their tea towels and bathrobes. The magi will dust off the costume jewellery and pack their impractical presents on improbable beasts. And we will dream the sweet dream of peace on earth.



For centuries now, we have come to the end of our calendar with the dream that as the darkness begins to yield to the dawn of a new year, our world and our lives could be as new as that baby in a manger. I have come to think that the problem with our annual pilgrimage to Bethlehem is that we have become Bethlehem bound. The stable has become a destination for almost every character in the script. Most of them are never heard from again. I want to know the rest of the story. Where did the shepherds go after they left the birthing suite? What became of them? Was it business as usual or were they never the same again? I want to ask where those messengers went next. What have they been up to since they startled Mary, invaded Joseph's dreams and scared the shepherds right off the hillsides? I want to know if the innkeeper ever turned anyone away again. We know the wise ones took a different route home but what did they tell folks when they finally got back home?

We know a little of the trouble and beauty of the parents' lives on the far side of Bethlehem. We know the story has them flee their homeland and seek refuge in Egypt. We know they raised a precocious child with a fiercely independent streak. We do know a bit about the brief adult life of that baby. But it seems there are never any reunions with those unlikely midwives who were among the first to welcome him into the world.

And what of those who seemed to disappear in Bethlehem never to be seen or heard from again. The answer makes me uneasy. Who are we but shepherds in search of what is coming to birth in an age when much is coming to death? Who are we if not the ones sent as messengers to tell where good news is to be found in a world of bad news? Who are we if not the wise committed to a journey that is both home and going home; that is about being on the road and building the road; that is about creating the world that is permeated with the glory of its creator and the peaceful coexistence of all peoples and creatures?

Wishing you a blessed journey toward and beyond the boundaries of our Bethlehems,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Steeves'.

Nancy Steeves