

The Magi have gone home now, back to Ethiopia, perhaps Persia, maybe Arabia or further East. Attending to their intuition, they evaded the wrath of the power-hungry potentate, the one who was about to slaughter all the innocent boys of Palestine.

We are still in this season of Epiphany, minus the kings, minus the boys. We rightly feasted and celebrated so richly this past Monday night, with an *agape* meal and sharing of the Eucharist. It struck me we might have been a first-century Christian community, breaking bread and breaking bread, and being grateful to be in each other's warm presence

The Epiphany marks the showing of Jesus to the outsiders, those wise ones representing the then-known world, these astrologers, Zoroastrians, foretasting good news for everyone.

Today's post-Epiphany readings jump immediately to these cousins, Johanan and Yeshua, *aka*, John and Jesus, both now 30-year-old 's. John the harbinger, Jesus the Center, the Beloved, the One who *was to* and now *has* come. John was at first regarded by many of the people of Palestine as maybe the Messiah so anxious were they for deliverance, from the Romans, no doubt from their corrupted leaders, perhaps from the prisons of their own making. Perhaps, just like us. Was this loin-clothed young man, the one eating locusts drenched in honey, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who will finally set us free?

John, the ascetical and prophetic preacher, was clear what his mission was: providing an immersion in the river for the forgiveness of sin to anticipate the Anointed One's immersion, and ours, into the deeper life of the Spirit.

When asked if he was the Messiah, John, a man of enormous spiritual presence and clarity, offered that he was unfit to even untie such a one's sandals.

This One arrives, in the next passage, showing himself for the first time since the infancy narrative. This man, Jesus, this second showing of Jesus, this baptism with water, submitting with gracious humility, to his cousin's radical ministry, and submitting to his own.

The Gospel writer notes that immediately after this immersion, Jesus began to pray. In his subsequent ministry, as he so often did, going out early in the morning, alone, to pray. Luke continues, now observing the Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus, this Holy One, in the form of a dove. And a Voice, *capital V*, came from where? *You are my Son, the Beloved. With You I am pleased.*

The Hebrew word for Spirit, *ruach*, means breath, wind, life.

The breath the Creator breathed into Adam and into Eve, breathed the life force that created and that brought humanity into being, flowing into Jesus, the breath of God, and now, to us, molecularly, this very same breath.

The Greek word for Spirit, *neuma*, or *numina*, similarly translates into spirit, a slight tautology, and again, to breath. The spirit, the presence that transcends bodily limitations and opens the embodied soul to grace, this numinous presence hovers over Jesus, and secures this anointing with thick grace. And now, so with us, too.

These sacred monikers, spirit, *ruach*, *numina*, are used 523 times in sacred scripture, suggesting the ongoing and interactive presence of

God, the God from within, and without, penetrating the far reaches of the world.

The symbol for the Spirit used in scripture—and reinforced by most every Renaissance painting of the big events in the life of Jesus, is that of the dove. The dove, symbol of innocence, purity, peace.

Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus balances the dove, with the serpent, as in recommending that we *be innocent as doves, and, not but, cunning as serpents*, too. A necessary complication.

I was reading about the symbol of the *dove* and found a reference to Celtic Christianity, ancient branch of Christianity that intrigues me, one rooted in nature and community and divine presence in the world of things. But a reference for the use of dove as symbol for Spirit, none to be found. Not surprisingly, for the Irish, who can be a wee bit cantankerous, must have found dove—as a symbol of Spirit—too passive and, I suspect, too pure, too ethereal. Looking around their own landscape, they replaced the Latinate dove, with *wild goose*! Yes, *Wild Goose*. I was of course delighted.

For the ancient Celts, the wild goose symbolized the fullest expression of exuberance, freedom, some healing sense of liberation, and importantly, cleverness. And Wild Geese were regarded much better as guardian than dogs, perhaps of the soul as well.

So to doves and tongues of fire and breath as the lexicon for the Spirit, I would like to add *wild geese*. Because I believe we are in a wild geese moment. And I am thinking, maybe projecting possibly, but I think Jesus gets that this is a wild geese moment, too, as perhaps so many moments are. This time calls for exuberance of purpose, freedom, healing, liberation, and without a doubt,

cleverness. And for the protection of the Spirit, with whatever avian creature we associate with this particular face of the Divine.

I have observed over many years that Episcopalians often have good manners, we are a polite people, abiding within a rich tradition, all singing from the same hymnal. But I detect, too, a little bit of wild geese energy here, maybe more than a little.

Wild Geese vigorously flap their wings and honk, endless honking, and leaving their detritus everywhere. Walk around Spring Lake, they make their presence known. But if they are a way of knowing the Spirit, then their flapping and honking is vital, and instructive, for us, in this Wild Geese moment.

I notice what transpired at the river Jordan and I listen to what words could be heard. The anointing was an absolute and overwhelming declaration by the Creator that *this man* was beloved by God. To echo the words of Isaiah in today's passage from Hebrew Scripture: *You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. Almost too close, too intimate, too could this possibly be true!*

If this were only about Jesus, we could nod our heads and, in a very churchy way, say, yes, of course this is true. Lovely passage. And that dove imagery, so comforting! So pure and good.

But this isn't only about Jesus. This is about you, and me, it's about us, a call to an utterly graced defiance of all that says *No* to humankind, and to all that is at stake in this human endeavor. And a resounding *Yes* to *all* that it means and requires and compels us as God's beloved: our work, our mission, our call. How could it be any other way? Why else would God embrace humanity and give us this utterly inexhaustible gift, Jesus, Jesus, in our very midst, Jesus in our very *us*? To do this sacred work, to complete creation, to deify all.

This is wild geese stuff, and this is Wild Geese time. For the Beloved, Jesus, gave all, emptied himself for us, was spent by love.

And his call to us, wrapped in his love as we are, to go into the world, flapping and honking, making a joyful and troubling noise —as wild geese certainly do and as John Lewis reminded us—to do good trouble—and bring his message, a message of love and justice, a message of *a preferential option for the poor, a camel going through the eye of a needle* message, a *prodigal son and father and brother* message, a *woman touching the hem of his garment* kind of message, a *for you are my beloved* message, to our own thick skulls first, and daily, and then, and only then, to every other thick- skulled, wounded but loveable flapping person hoping against hope that this message, this One, is true.

Our lives in these Wild Geese times depend on our response o this holy call.

William D Glenn 12 January 25