

## Christmas morning 2023

St Brandon's

Micah 5: 2,4; Luke 2:1-14

25 December 2023

[Google Maps](#) focused on Middle East

We have many different characters in our Gospel reading this morning, and the question I want us to try to answer is: 'Who travelled the furthest?' Let's start with Mary and Joseph.

Game: Pin tail on donkey – where are Nazareth and Bethlehem? (*Volunteers to come out and point: click to pinpoint / click to delete*).

*Scroll in to show and click to highlight (brings up pictures)*. How far apart are they? Distance = about 100km+. (Bing maps says 93 miles by road). Let's say 70 miles.

What about the shepherds? "In that region (of Bethlehem) there were shepherds living in the fields".

*Scroll in to show 'Church of Nativity' and 'Shepherds' field'. Distance = about 1.5km or 1 mile.*

*Pinpoint 'Church of Nativity'. Change to Satellite view, scroll in to Shepherds' field.*

So easy for them to get there – as the Angel said to them: 'Down to Shepherds Field St, past Shepherd Field Hospital and keep going until you come to the Church of the Nativity. Can't miss it!'

Now not in our reading, but they're here in Church already, so let's include the wise men in this.

*Map view and scroll out to include India.*

We know they came from the East to Jerusalem but where might they have started? No real idea, but could have been as far as India.

So who travelled the furthest? Clearly the wise men. But let's look into this a little further.

*Minimise map, open Powerpoint.*

Let's start again with Mary & Joseph. And here's a quiz question. Did they travel the 100km/70 miles

- a) By donkey?
- b) By motorbike and sidecar?
- c) By helicopter? Or
- d) None of these?

Answer d) – there's no mention of a donkey in the NT.

But whether a donkey or not, it would clearly have been a long, tiring journey particularly for the by now probably heavily pregnant Mary. But more than just physically, the journey would also likely have been one involving real concern for the baby – would He be OK? And for the birth – where might that happen? And for the future – would everything be all right? Would the promises made to her by the angel, that God would give her son the throne of His ancestor David, be fulfilled or would it all go horribly wrong? So Mary at least, and maybe Joseph too,

was probably travelling a long way in her mind, as well as in her body. That's a long but significant journey.

*Next slide - shepherds.*

So what about the shepherds? We've seen that they didn't need to travel very far physically. And they knew the way – over there! But what kind of journey had they been on? They'd been minding their own business (literally!). They'd been overcome by fear and awe at the presence of the angels. They'd made the short journey to the manger and seen the Christ child. They'd come from being poor, humble, and on the margins of society. And now God Himself was taking them very seriously indeed. That's a long but amazing journey.

*Next slide – shepherds and angels.*

Now we agreed that the wise men must have travelled the furthest. But we hadn't included the angels. How far had they travelled? Well, we're told that after they had sung God's praises they left and went into heaven. So how far is it from heaven to earth and back again?! And the answer is clearly 'Not as far as you might think!' Particularly if you're an angel, of course, but perhaps even for us? Mmm.

*Next slide – wise men.*

So what about the wise men? We know they travelled a long way from the East. Did they travel on camels? Were there three of them? We don't know, of course. But, like Mary, and like the shepherds, their journey was more than just physical. They were from a different religion and culture. They were important people – Herod took them seriously – but they were really on a journey searching for truth. That's a long journey.

*Next slide – Jesus.*

But finally, we haven't so far thought about Jesus Himself. Good of his parents to tidy themselves up for the photo! So how far was Jesus's journey? He was Word who was in the beginning with God. He came into being as a baby in Mary's womb. He was bumped about quite a bit on the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Then He made the journey of actually being born. And now here He is in human form. 'The maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me'. The one by whom all things in heaven and earth were created – He's now part of and vulnerable to His own creation. That really is quite a journey! And, I think, definitely the furthest journey of all. It's God in Christ who has travelled the furthest to be with us.

And I guess the questions for us this morning are: How far have we travelled on our journey to meet and greet the Christ child, the one who has travelled furthest to be with us? And what has our journey involved? Perhaps thinking hard about it, as Mary must have done. Perhaps having things revealed to us, as happened to the shepherds. Perhaps like them responding with enthusiasm 'let's go and see', while ignoring what the rest of society might think about us. Perhaps being on a search for truth as the wise men were, being open to new possibilities.

And then the other question for us is, how much further are we prepared to travel?

Amen