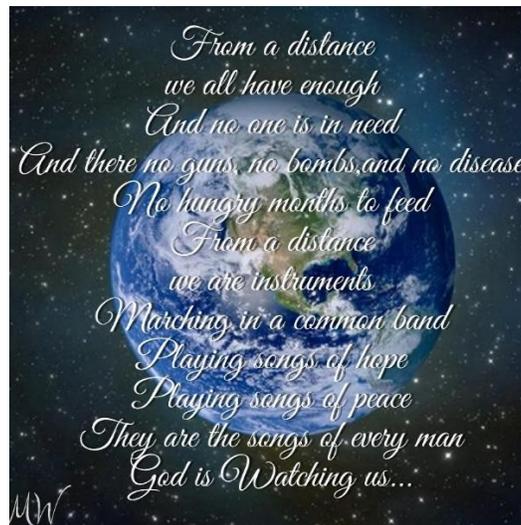


From a Distance.....



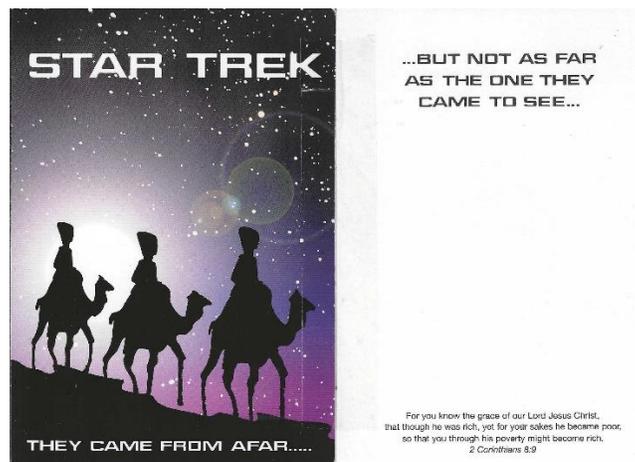
Sung most famously by Bette Midler, one of my favourite songs of the mid 80's sprang into my mind as I was contemplating 'where we're at' in our collective COVID journey. We have been physically distanced from each other for a long time, despite the wonders of Zoom and other social media platforms, and it is difficult to maintain the relational closeness and camaraderie we thrive on. We Brits have a penchant for extracting humour from difficult situations to keep ourselves on an even keel and maintain perspective.

I recently received a short video (American I admit), circulating among my phone contacts, of a young teacher who was straight-facedly promoting her latest song composition written during a lockdown. She skilfully prepares us for this revelation with a string of gentle chords on her guitar. She then proceeds to let out an ear-piercing scream which constitutes the song. It shocks the system because we are led to expect a soothing lullaby but, no language needed, it is a demonstration of the pent-up feelings of many of us.

For many hermits of the past, their isolation was self-imposed, but for most of us, our isolation is a necessary encumbrance we must endure for the common good. For the most part, and with God's help, we endure with grace, but the simmering

frustrations and resentment can bubble up without warning, surprising us with their ferocity.

During Advent I wrote about how the stature of waiting (on God) has an important part in our spiritual journey, and I returned to this when I was sifting through some Christmas cards which I had kept, as they had had an important impact on my thinking over the years.



We are currently in the season of Epiphany, the subject of Jackie's reflection last week (God's Star) and the online written service last Sunday. I can't claim to be an avid Star Trekkie, but it is an apt title for the card which I've reproduced here, reminding us of the Journey of the Magi and equating it with the journey Jesus made for us from his place seated at the right hand of God. Only the gospel of Matthew relates their story, and we are only given the 'bare bones'.

Nevertheless, it set me to wondering how long these Wise Men/ Astrologers/Kings from the East (Persia?) had been studying the astrological patterns of the night sky for signs of a portentous event which, in modern lingo, would be a 'game-changer' for humankind. When the 'star' appeared, how long did they take to make their decision to follow it? – a great act of faith when you think about it. I wonder how long it took to reach their goal? Their faith and endurance eventually paid off: they experienced an epiphany – the revelation of God incarnate on earth – and returned home as changed people. I wonder what happened to them thereafter?

They travelled a great distance both spiritually and physically. We are not currently travelling great distances – or are we? Are we achieving the mindset of the Magi where we are opening ourselves to experiencing our own epiphany(ies)? As last Sunday's service says:

"These moments require openness, listening, seeking, believing and trusting. The Magi had conviction that God was with them and would show them the way by the light of the Guiding Star."

Maybe, in the current dire situation in which we find ourselves, we feel distanced from each other and all that is familiar to us, and more importantly, from God, as we struggle to cope with personal tragedies, come to terms with a restricted form of living, deal practically with everyday difficulties and look on helplessly as we watch those 'on the front line' becoming more exhausted and weary, with no sign of a reprieve. Using Rev'd Gerry's practical suggestions set out in her Tuesday reflection, ask God to meet us where we are and lead us to still waters in our hearts and minds.

We pray:

Gracious Lord, I offer you my unworthiness, my sadness. Take them up into your great work of healing and redeeming humankind. I ask this in your precious name. Amen

This week I removed my (empty) 2020 calendar from the wall and noticed that, on the cover, which had been hidden for the duration of the year, was the title: "Our Days In His Hands" with the words:

"I trust in you Lord. My times are in your hands" Psalm 31: 14,15

Blessings to you all – from a distance.

Elaine