

January 7, 2018 The Incredible Journey Homily: *The Incredible Journey* is an enormously successful Children's story that was penned by the author Sheila Burnford. Published in 1961, the book enjoyed great critical success. Later it was picked up by the Disney Studio and made into an entertaining full length feature film. A more recent effort by Hollywood to bring the story to the screen resulted in a change of title to "*Homeward Bound; The Incredible Journey*".

Ms. Burnford tells the story of three animals, all pets, who want to be reunited with their kindhearted and caring masters. To achieve their goal, they are willing to make all the necessary sacrifices. Together, they undertake a long and difficult journey of three hundred miles through the harsh Northern Canadian wilderness. On the way they face many challenges, including possible starvation, exposure to the natural elements, the threat of wild animals and the bad behavior of human beings. Somehow, they persevered and did not lose heart. The story ends on a happy note. The pets are re-united with their masters.

The author underscores two important points. First, the magnetic power of love; and second, the mystery of God's invisible hand in guiding the animals to their destination His providence is their salvation.

On the feast of the Epiphany one might speak of the incredible journey of the Magi. Having left everything behind they begin an incredible journey, which is their destiny. They are in a personal quest for the truth, and in search of the True, Living God. They come "from the East", from the ends of the earth. In truth, they represent all those who have found their way to Jesus Christ. They initiate a procession that continues throughout history.

Who are the Magi? One can't be sure of an answer. Scholars differ on this point. Were they members of a priestly caste? Scientists/Astrologers? Magicians? Kings (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar)? But virtually all scholars agree on one crucial point, namely, that they were gentiles and not members of the chosen people.

Unlike the shepherds on the night of Christmas, the Magi had the longest and most difficult journey to Bethlehem. God intervened in an extraordinary way to lead them to the Messiah. The "star" may have been a literary device used by the evangelist to highlight God's plan in shining His Light on all peoples. The Magi are drawn to the light, who is Christ.

The former Pontiff, Benedict XVI, points out that the scriptures show us a God who is also on a journey. He is on a pilgrimage to man. In Jesus Christ, God Himself has set out to us. He comes from what we call eternity and is born in a stable in Bethlehem.

The Evangelist tells us that the Magi could no longer follow the road they came on. Returning to Herod was out of the question. They traced a new road, a new path. As disciples of Jesus, we must take a different road, too.

Reliable polling data clearly indicate that far too many baptized Christians have drifted away from the practice of the faith. Too many wander aimlessly on roads that lead them nowhere, to an unanticipated

dead end: moral relativism, religious indifference and all sorts of addiction. Perhaps we each are called to be a “star”, a point of light, to lead other to Jesus by our faithful witness.

Our incredible journey continues today. Our destination remains the same. Let each of us pause at the crib of Jesus that gives forth the light that shines on us all!

Amen!