

PRAY We
live in the mystery of
God who gives life.
(repeat after each date)

SPiRIT

13.7 billion years ago:

THE FIREBALL All the energy that exists flares forth in a vast unfurling of space, a trillion-degree blast so powerful the universe is still expanding. Slowly the fireball expands and cools until hydrogen and helium bond.

13.7-10 billion years ago:

GALAXIES Gravity pulls matter together slightly faster than the universe expands, constellating the universe into trillions of separate clouds of hydrogen and helium—the galaxies. Big ones form by swallowing little ones.

SUPERNOVAS The clouds of hydrogen and helium fracture into self-imploding centers—the primal stars.

5 billion years ago: OUR SOLAR SYSTEM

4 billion years ago: BACTERIA

2 billion years ago: CELLS WITH NUCLEI

30 million years ago: FIRST APES

2.6 million years ago: FIRST HUMANS HOMO HABILIS

1.5 million years ago: HUNTERS HOMO ERECTUS

200,000 years ago: ARCHAIC HOMO SAPIENS

40,000 years ago: MODERN HOMO SAPIENS

2 thousand years ago: JESUS IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Epiphany

All nations worship Jesus.

NARRATOR: After Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of King Herod, magi from the east arrived one day in Jerusalem.

MAGI: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.

NARRATOR: At this news King Herod became greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem. He summoned all of the chief priests and scribes of the people.

HEROD: Where is the messiah to be born?

PRIESTS, SCRIBES: In Bethlehem of Judea. Here is what the prophet has written.

MICAH: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is shepherd to my people Israel.

NARRATOR: Herod called the magi aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions.

HEROD: Go and get detailed information about the child. Report your findings to me, so that I may go and offer him homage, too.

NARRATOR: After their audience with the king, the magi set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They received a message in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

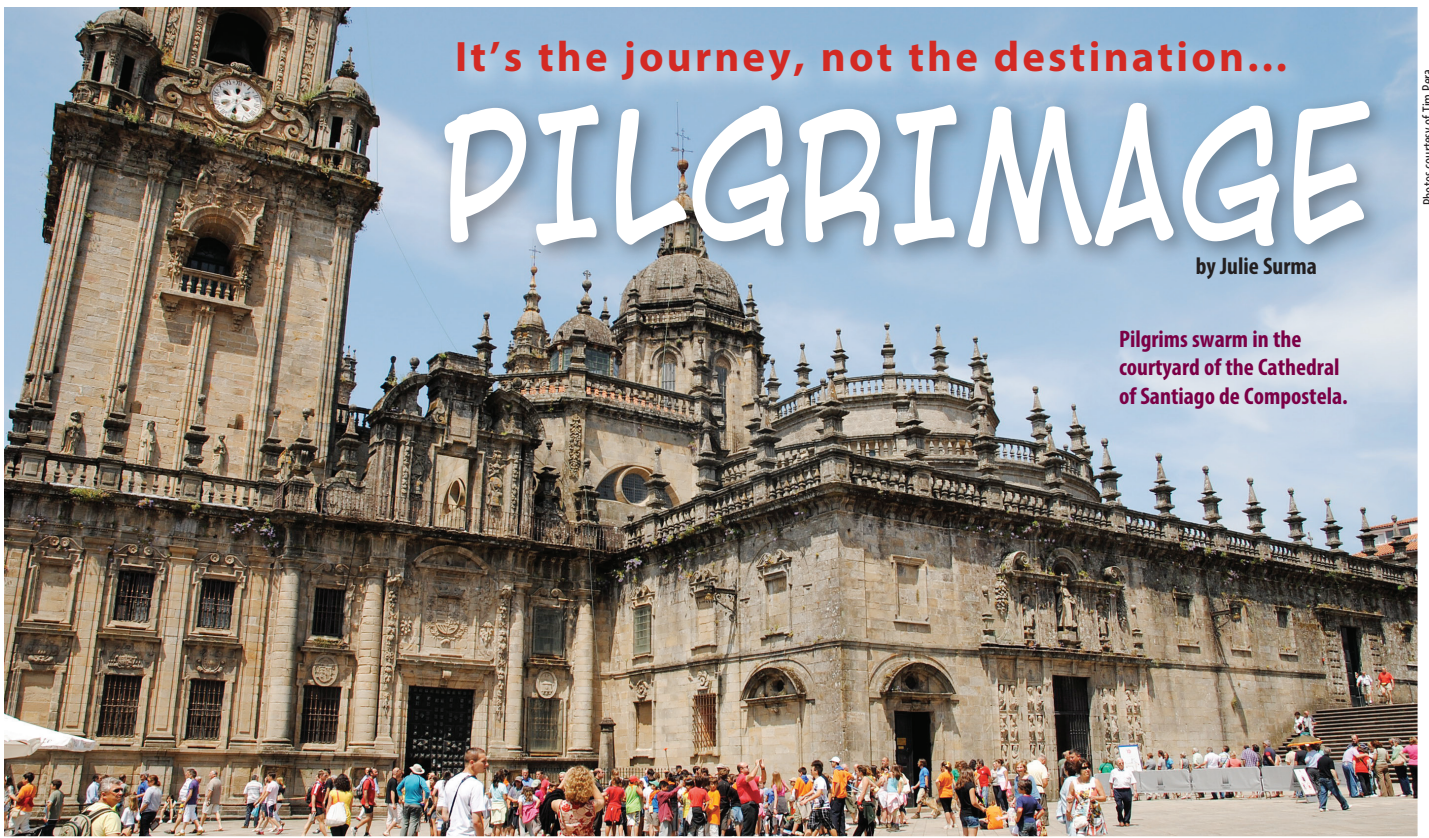
Matthew 2.1-12

It's the journey, not the destination...

PILGRIMAGE

by Julie Surma

Pilgrims swarm in the courtyard of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.



Photos courtesy of Tim Pera

Do you wonder what might happen if you took a break from all social networking, ditched your cell phone and your computer, and slowed down to take a (very) long walk with your friends?

How about taking a six-day walk along a holy route that people have been traversing for 1,000 years?

Fourteen teens and five leaders from St. Clement's Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, did exactly that. The group walked only a small part of the ancient Camino de Santiago, which stretches nearly 500 miles from southern France to northwest Spain. They started in Sarria, Spain, and ended 68 miles later at the shrine of St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

"Many churches do mission trips with their teens, which is a good thing," says youth pilgrimage leader Susan Mallison. "But we want to give our teens time to see where they are as spiritual people. They are asking the big, big questions, and this journey gives them the space to look at where their faith is."

"Basically, the day is walking," Susan continues. "We get up pre-

dawn to start walking, because it gets hot in the middle of the day. We arrive at the next stopping place in the afternoon, rest, take a shower, and wash our socks. We stay in simple, big rooms filled with bunk beds."

"I liked the walking the best," says Alexander. "I chose who I walked with but also had time to think by myself."

"I liked being in a group," says Allie.

"The pilgrimage was best after we were done walking," says Ellen, "when we were all at the hostel together, being tired together, and eating together."

"The pilgrimage provides security for a spiritual journey," Kyra adds. "For kids our age, talking about how we feel about God is taboo. So it is nice to have a place where

we can express our feelings, no matter where we are on the journey. Everyone respects each other's perspectives."

Every evening the pilgrims gather for a meeting to process the day. Sometimes the teens answer a question they receive the night before to think about on the day's walk. For example, "Where do you see the face of God today?"

The group also writes postcards of gratitude in the evenings to every family in the parish, thanking them for supporting the pilgrimage and telling home folks they are praying for them specifically that night. The teens also open one letter of support a night from a parish family or a former pilgrim.

"I usually don't get letters by mail," says Sam. "I looked forward every day to reading another letter."

"Some of the people who wrote letters were talking to me about things they wouldn't normally talk about," Jenna notes. "God is not a normal social topic. I heard things I didn't expect to hear."



The seashell is the symbol of the Camino, marking the path along the way.



“The letters made me part of something bigger,” says Allie. “On the trail we had only each other, but the letters reminded me of all the support we had back home.”

In preparing for the trip teens learned that pilgrims tell stories. During the evening gathering at some point in the trip, each teen tells two stories—a bible story and a personal story.

“Usually the personal story tells something that we don’t already know about each other,” says Ellen. “Reflecting on those stories is powerful.”

“The group jelled in such a deep and profound way as we listened with caring and understanding to the stories,” says Susan. “I sat with my eyes closed. I couldn’t watch. It’s like Moses and the burning bush; it was so holy.”

“I proved to myself that I could do the pilgrimage,” says Kyra. “To have only two outfits, carry everything in my pack, and walk for a long period each day was definitely a struggle. But I found it empowering to be able actually to do it. It was equally empowering to watch those around me do it!”

Carrying everything on one’s back is an important part of the pilgrimage experience. It brings up questions such as: What do I bring with me? What am I willing to carry? What can I leave behind?

“A pilgrimage is a pretty bare bones trip. At some point people

come to realize that,” says Liz, an adult leader. “We only need the clothes on our backs and the ones that are drying in our backpacks. A pilgrim needs to shed things because it’s really hard to carry everything. We brought letters and prayers from our congregation that added to the physical

weight, but I wouldn’t leave them out.”

“I would leave out the blisters I got!” says Allie.

Adult leader Jenna adds, “Physically the trail is hard.



Sometimes it is urban and nicely paved. Other times it was like portaging in the Boundary Waters—tough. We set goals to make because we had a big group. Some days people were sick with dehydration or blisters, but none of us were afraid. The Red Cross has stations along the way. We discovered that the Camino—and the group—takes care of us.”

“Something happens as we walk where other Christians have walked for centuries to a designated holy place. The road connected us with our spiritual history,” says Susan.

On arrival at the Cathedral in Santiago, pilgrims take their *credencial* or Pilgrim Record, duly stamped along the

way, to the nearby Pilgrim Office. The office issues a Compostela certificate (still written in Latin) that confirms the completion of the pilgrimage. Walkers and pilgrims on horseback must complete at least the last 100 km and cyclists the last 200 km to qualify for the certificate.

“What sticks with me is that the pilgrimage helped me make God small,” says Kyra. “That sounds kind of weird. But I realized on my faith journey my issues have to do with thinking of God as too big—a huge, monolithic entity that could solve all my problems. I had an internal conflict about that.

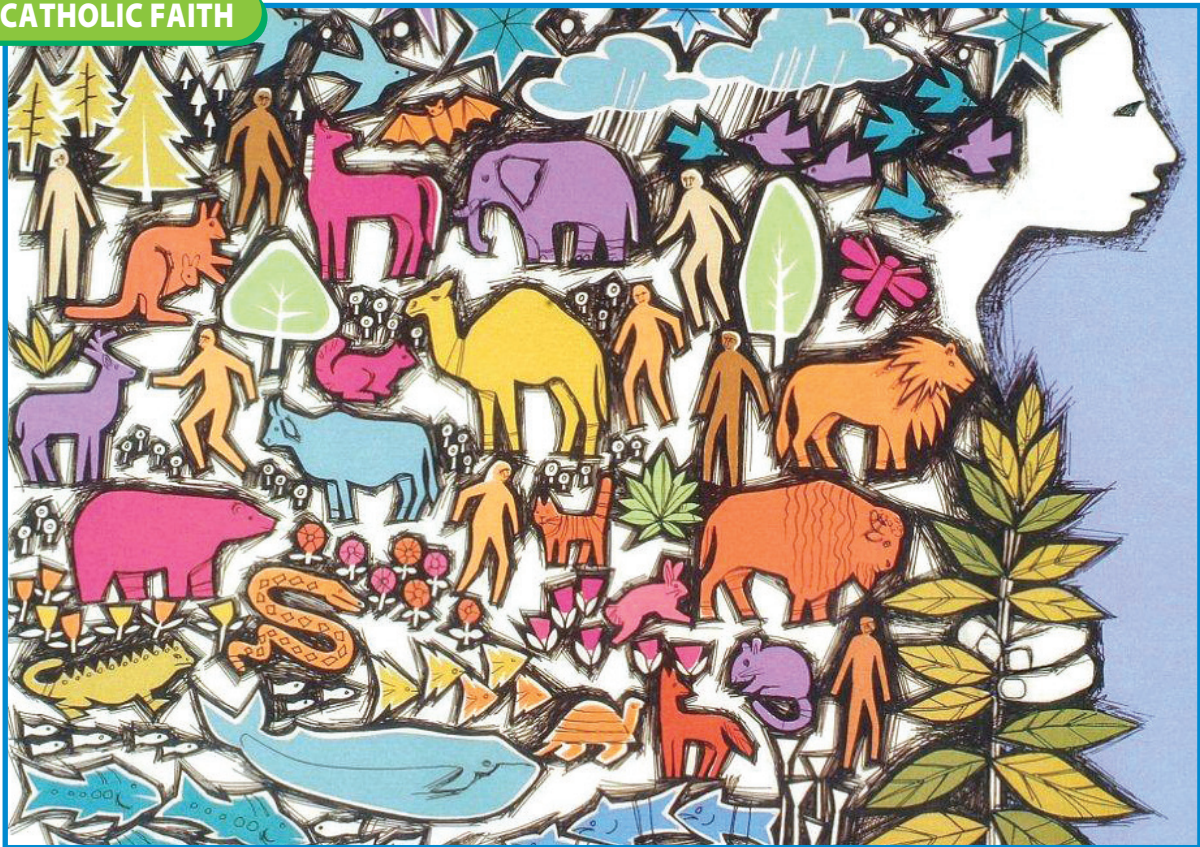
“But every night we answered the question, ‘Where did you see

the face of God today?’ That was always really easy for me. I could see God when I got to the top of a hill, or in nature, or even in a friend. I realized that finding God in small things was easy. So now I’m trying to expand that circle a bit

and find ways to see God as bigger. The pilgrimage helped me see small bits of God everywhere.”

QUESTIONS

- 1 What makes a pilgrimage different from a walk?
- 2 What would you be willing to carry with you on pilgrimage?
- 3 What makes listening to each other’s stories holy?
- 4 How do you answer the pilgrimage question, “Where do you see the face of God today?”
- 5 How is a pilgrimage like the journey of the magi?
- 6 Where do the magi see the face of God?



Art Marion Honors, CSJ

What gifts do we bring to the Christ Child?

The story of bringing gifts to the Christ child has tickled the imaginations of many creative people. Carlo Menotti wrote an opera about a poor boy who goes with the magi to bring his gift to the Christ child—Amahl and the Night Visitors.

Christmas carolers love to sing “The Little Drummer Boy.” Some singers imitate the drum while others sing his story. Like the magi the little drummer boy wants to give his gift to the king—“I’ll play my drum for him, pah rum pah pum pum.”

The word epiphany, the name of Sunday’s feast, means revelation or manifestation. This is a story that shows forth or reveals who Jesus is. The magi come from the East. They are not Jews but Gentiles. Their action acknowledges Jesus is a light of revelation to all the nations of the world.

“The desire for God is written in the human heart,” says the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#27). Human beings are created by and for God. Our experience

of the natural world draws us toward its Creator.

What motivates the magi to set off on their journey is a star, a phenomenon in the night sky of the natural world. Magi means someone who studies the stars. The magi seek to understand the meaning of what they see. The world and its wonders invite us to seek their source.

In our time photos and new, amazing data about the universe appear online almost every week. Our telescopes peer at planets forming. We have being in an evolutionary process in which everything that is wants to be all it can be, tends toward diversity and toward consciousness. Our wonder expands with our understanding of our cosmos.

Studying is a way of praying. Studying the evolving cosmos can lead to adoration of God’s amazing creativity. Science discovers all being evolves out of the energy of the big bang. We live in one vast interrelated web of life. We

are its conscious face. We have the gifts to be cocreators with God.

In Jesus’ ministry we, his followers, find the mission we continue. Jesus’ ministry calls us to preach God’s love for all people, to heal, to liberate people from addictions and injustice, to forgive, to include the outcast, and to build up the Christian community of Jesus’ disciples today. We bring our gifts to the Christ child today by using our gifts in ministry.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Consider going on pilgrimage to the cathedral of your diocese or to an inner-city parish.
- 2 Pay attention to the gifts and talents of your friends and family. Encourage someone this week to develop a hidden or forgotten gift.
- 3 Use the art above to thank God for all that is.
- 4 What is a way you cocreate our evolving world with God?