

Epiphany

6 January

There we were, after the flames had danced above our heads
And the Spirit had poured himself over and through us.
Then we knew, then we understood
What all that terrifying mess was for;
The early summons by the sea,
The early excitement of something new, something different;
Someone new, someone different.
And how we flocked and followed,
Eager to see, eager to hear
But always being thwarted by our lack of vision, lack of trust, even.
Be safe with what you know, the recalcitrant voice shouted in our heads,
And that fallback position wrestled constantly with the eagerness.

And there we were at the foot of the cross
All had gone wrong, terribly wrong.
We stood staring blankly.
Is this what love had come to? we silently asked.
Eagerness replaced by emptiness, a hollow vacuum with a poisonous echo.
We trudged back, and then...

What? A new life? A resurrected man?
But this only led to more confusion, more furrowed brows, more anxiety.
Until the Spirit danced among us,
Shattering the stasis with unquenchable fire.

And here I am. Here I am. In some strange land,
Brought here by the Spirit's promptings.
Go and make disciples! Go and make. Go!
And we have gone, in various directions, to see, to tell, to enthuse.
James, ever the sensible one, stayed home to keep the squabbling contained:
Peter, after a while, left for the West,
No doubt trying to play catch up with Saul,
The manic, intemperate Saul, who would always, always be one step ahead.

And I? To the East I am drawn.
Leaving the safety of my home, my customs, my rituals.
Knowing that these have already been challenged;
Matthew's scribblings saw to that, what with dubious women
Tearing apart that hallowed lineage,
And with 'wise men from the East' being granted favoured status
By seeing him, by worshipping him first.

'Wise men from the East!
And what is their wisdom?
The wisdom of the perfumed and the fragrant,
The wisdom of the angel and the unlocking of the secrets of heaven,
The wisdom of magic and of numbers.
Not the wisdom of our forefather, the wisdom of the book,
Of the practised, of the traditions of centuries.

It is from here, from within our wisdom,
That he has been grafted on to our sensibilities,
And so he emerges from our security and our repose.
And this is how we will tell of him, from within our safe house.

I journey on, leaving behind that security and that repose,
The atmosphere and the appearance
Everything changes as I journey on,
Towards those strange cities,
Where people peer at me with darkened eyes,
Wearing exotic robes, listening to a different music
Apprehending a different god or gods.
Well, that is how it seems to me.

I stand there in my simplicity, at the heart of this alien world
Marvelling in its delights
As well as instinctively summoning a caution against over exposure.
I don't want what I have to bring to be too distilled by the fragrant air
Or overcome by caustic spices.

And then, in my caution, I am aware
Of an old man watching me.
A man with sunken, lined eyes, a flowing white beard, a purple robe
Decorated with stars.
He is new to me, but I, I seem familiar to him.
Or rather, not me, but what I have become, am becoming.
His deep eyes see through to me, and I am caught by his gaze.

It is as if he has seen what I have seen, for there is a recognition,
Not of anything past remembered
But a new thing that we, different though we are, share.
A true re-cognition, that bridges the sandy distance, the different music, the caustic
spices.
He approaches with halting steps, and I wait for him.
And as he stands before me, his gaze never wavering,
He says in an accented version of my tongue,
Wearied but unbowed,
'What took you so long?'