

In the 4th step of the Pilgrimage of Hope, we ponder the experience of being ALONE AND IN COMMUNITY. As we step our way through our journey as pilgrims, sometimes we are alone, sometimes we are in community.

The notion of pilgrimage does not appear in the gospels, but occasions of sacred travel do. Three such accounts concern Mary, the mother of Jesus:

**The Visitation
The journey to Bethlehem
The flight into Egypt**

The **third period of sacred travel involving Mary** is contained in Matthew's gospel. Soon after the birth of Jesus and after the visit of the 'wise men from the East came to Jerusalem to visit the newborn baby and pay homage to him' (Matt. 2:13-29).

Herod became aware of this sacred birth from the wise men and, threatened by the prospect of a new king deposing him, sought to kill the infant Jesus. In a dream, Joseph was commanded to 'take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt'. **And so another journey must be undertaken** to protect the life of Mary's baby.

Travelling with a newborn is never easy, either for the mother or baby, and this trip had to be undertaken in secret, at night, to avoid being found.

To ponder: The need for this trip was driven by imminent danger. It was essential that Mary, Joseph and Jesus travelled alone to avoid detection.

When we think of pilgrimage, we realise there will be times when we need to be alone with our own thoughts, at times of prayer, etc. Yet we know there'll be others along the way to befriend and share part of the journey with. For this sacred travel, taking the infant Jesus safely to Egypt, away from the threat to his life, the trip was one of aloneness. Yet despite this enforced aloneness, the Holy Family was, itself, a small community of faith.



Image above: Andrea Mantegna, Adoration of the Magi, Getty Museum

Image: Flight into Egypt, Henry Ossawa Turner



In time, after the death of Herod, the Holy Family, guided by an angel's warning to Joseph in a dream not to go to Israel, travelled to Nazareth in Galilee and settled – another journey with a young baby. (Matt. 2:13-23)

To ponder: Though the Holy Family were temporarily in exile in Egypt, eventually they became part of the Jewish community in Galilee. It was in the safety of this community that Jesus experienced his childhood. Our world contains hundreds of thousands of people who have needed to flee to safety and found a new life for themselves and their families. How well do we welcome newcomers to our communities, especially those who have sought refuge in our nation from danger to life in their homeland?



These three prayer and reflection resources have provided the opportunity to reflect on three journeys of sacred travel involving Mary: the Visitation; the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem; and the journey from Bethlehem to Egypt.

For Mary and Joseph, during each of these times there must have been a sense of aloneness as they faced the imminent birth of the infant Jesus, then the travels that preceded and followed that birth. Pregnancy is a time of waiting, a time when the parents of the forming child realise and dwell on how important this new event in their lives will be. For most parents awaiting a birth, there is the joy of sharing the anticipation with family, friends and community. For these parents, the uniqueness of their situation imposed isolation meant that Elizabeth was the only person with whom the good news could be shared.

Yet God's grace was always with them.

Mary's actions, and Joseph's, were driven by their faith and their deep commitment to serving God. **The Holy Family was itself a small faith community**, where the events of the lives of Mary and Joseph with their newborn son Jesus could be pondered. Always their travel had a sacred element to it, because the baby who was the cause of each of the three journeys was Jesus, the Son of God. Mary's deep faith allowed her to appreciate the significance of what was happening to her and what God was giving to humankind.

God of all people and God of all creation, we thank you for the faith of Mary and Joseph as they courageously faced the uncertainties of bringing your Son to birth. Without the guarantee of safety and a roof over their heads, they journeyed into the unknown, driven by their trust in you. In-still that same trust in us, that whatever uncertainties our journey involves, we remain focused on your love and mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

