

Another country

Navigating customs on arrival

You know those first few minutes of a holiday in a strange country? You have stepped off the plane. Everything suddenly feels different – the climate, the language, the sights and scenes. Which way are we going? Can we find what we are looking for? Who could we ask? Where could we find help? Passport control, customs, baggage reclaim – arrivals can all be a bit bewildering, especially with the added weariness of the journey to get there. And this is just a holiday. It will all settle down. It is only temporary. In a while we can go back to the familiarity of home. Besides, for the price of a taxi ride, we probably have enough money to buy our way out of all of our uncertainties about the next phase of our journey.



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. Talk about a time when you felt disorientated by being in another country. How did you feel? What would have helped?

Being the church of ‘Céad Míle Fáilte’

Imagine what it is like for the many people arriving in Ireland from all around the globe to start a new life in the strange place that is Ireland. What is home to us is a million miles from everything that feels familiar for them. Famous as the land of a ‘hundred thousand welcomes’, the first and best of them offered to those coming from another country should be found in the local church.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. What contact, if any, does your congregation have with people who have come from another country? How did they find their way to your church?

Bethlehem: A picture of church in today's global village

At the greatest moment of mission in the Bible, when God sends his son Jesus into the world, the global reach of what he is doing is reinforced as Mary and Joseph receive visitors from another country. We read about it in Matthew 2:1-12.

READ MATTHEW 2:1-12



The Magi find a home from home with Jesus

The birth of Jesus has taken place in Bethlehem, on the home soil of an already hallowed place in the history of the people of God. Mary, Joseph and Jesus are gathered as a family in what is, for the moment, all there is of the New Testament church. The first thing that happens is that some travellers from distant lands appear at the door. Matthew calls them Magi. We know them best in the Christmas garb of the Wise Men. But take them out of the festive scene and set them in the bigger flow of the unfolding story of the gospel and what happens here has much to teach us about how to be the church in today's increasingly global village.

Like anyone coming from another country into a strange place, the Magi are disorientated

on arrival. They have come for a reason, but that doesn't make things straightforward. They don't quite know where to go. They don't easily find what they are looking for. But behind all appearances, they don't come by accident. They are drawn there by God through following his sign of the star.


After an awkward brush with authority at Herod's palace, they find their way to Bethlehem. There they find family and home, an end to their life's quest and a hope for the future. It's what the church can offer every stranger from another country that arrives at their door. For the Magi are welcomed. They worship. They bring a wealth of gifts. They are equipped for a life of witness to their own people.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. What do we learn from the Magi's story and experience that can help us welcome those coming from another country today?

Q. The Magi join in the worship of Jesus, but their famous gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh also contribute to the wealth and storyline of God's mission in Jesus. What particular gifts and insights might those coming from another country bring to the life and witness of our congregation today?

Q. The Magi return home after meeting Jesus with good news to share. In what ways might our church equip and support those who come from another country for witness both here and back in their homeland?

 Watch this short clip that challenges us to think about the experience of those who come into a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland from another country.



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Q. What parts of Carel’s story got you thinking about how difficult it might be for someone from another country to come to your congregation for the first time?

Q. What could your congregation do to be a more welcoming and accessible home for those who come from a different country?

Q. “Don’t be afraid to walk over to meet somebody, that you haven’t seen in church, for the first time.” Why are we sometimes afraid to talk to someone from a different country? How can we overcome those fears?

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- Pray for those who have come from another country to live in your community, that they will experience a welcome and find a home.
- Pray that your local congregation would develop and build upon links with those who have come to the area from another country.
- Pray for eyes to see those who have come from another country and might be struggling with life, and wisdom in how best to support and help them.
- Pray for an openness in our congregation to learn from other followers of Jesus around the world and particularly those with whom we have close contact.