

Easter Journey in Langwathby



For the fourth year running, groups of Year 5 children from eight primary schools in the Eden Valley in Cumbria, plus their teachers and parent chauffeurs, made a unique Easter Journey through Langwathby Methodist Church. Gazebos transformed the church into a sequence of locations beginning on the dusty road into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The children were immersed in the events of a week in which Jesus Christ encountered acclaim and opposition, friendship and hostility.

They were invited to consider what kind of king it is who rides humbly into the city on a donkey, yet overturns the tables of the traders in the Temple, angry at the sight of the poor being cheated in the place where they should have had the freedom to come and worship their God. The children became sheep and pigeon traders and money-changers in the Temple, vying with each other to trade with the worshippers coming to sacrifice at the Passover Festival. When Jesus turned over their stalls, what did they think of this king then?

What kind of king washes the feet of his followers before they share together the seder meal of the Last Supper but also gives them bread and wine (represented by a grape) that they might remember his body broken and blood shed as part of God's new agreement of love with the men and women he created?

The children followed Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane and hid behind bushes whilst he prayed. They experienced the sounds of the night: the crunch of Roman soldiers' boots, scuffles, sword fight, and Jesus sighing, 'Not my will, but Yours', as the disciples snored instead of keeping watch and heard the cock crow three times. What kind of king is this who refused to summon the armies of heaven to help him when he was betrayed by one of his own disciples but rather allowed himself to be led away by Roman soldiers to appear before King Herod and Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor? One who could not be found guilty of any crime, but was nailed to a cross to die. How do we understand the contradictions of such a king?

A clip from the animated film *The Miracle Maker* showed the crucifixion of Jesus. Everyone waited in stunned silence in the dark, claustrophobic space experiencing for themselves the uncertainty of Easter Saturday.

Among the fear and sadness, the delight and surprise of Easter morning is revealed to the children as they enter into the blazing glory of the Resurrection Garden, overflowing with spring flowers, plants and trees. Mary Magdalene sees the stone that had sealed the cave into which Jesus' body had been laid, now rolled to one side, the grave clothes neatly folded. She hears that familiar voice: 'Mary'. Jesus, alive, comes to her in a new Easter way and she is sent to tell his friends, 'He is risen!'

Serious sadness and surprised delight. That is the joy of Easter that the children entered into. How can we hold the two together?

Finally the children contemplated the events they had witnessed, reflected on what it meant to them and considered why Christians have found the story important enough to return to it year after year for two millennia.

So many people from our churches offered their time, gifts and abilities to make this event possible and successful. A huge 'Thank you' is owed to all, as well as to the children who came and the schools who trusted the children to us on their Easter Journey.

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