

## **“Home By Another Road”**

*Matthew 2:1-18*

Rev. Michael Stol

This is how God met some searchers where they were and changed their lives forever.

Once there were three men who set out upon a long journey. I say “three” – although we really don’t know their number. Our Scripture doesn’t tell us --could have been more or less. Nor do we know their names.

We think of these visitors to Jesus as kings or wise men. But the word in the original Greek to describe them really means “magicians” or “sorcerers”-- people who were known for their abilities in reading the stars and understanding the signs of the times. In ancient times many kings wanted magi like these as their counsellors to their kingdom. At the time when the biblical story of Jesus’ birth was written, magi were seen as mysterious foreigners – very different from what the Jews and Romans were used to – exotic outsiders from faraway places.

These magi took quite a journey to find Jesus. We don’t get any details about the journey, but since we know they were traveling from the east, we can imagine it was a very long journey through some pretty fierce landscapes.

Because the magi were star-gazers they were quick to notice an unusual body hovering in the heavens. Matthew calls it a star, and modern-day scholars have had a field day surmising that this body might have been a supernova, a comet, the conjunction of two planets like Jupiter and Saturn, or something else entirely. But whatever this body was, the magi knew they needed to follow it. And it wasn’t really the star that moved, of course, it was the people traveling toward it. It just appeared that way to them as they travelled.

The magi weren’t exactly sure what the heavens were telling them, but something told them they needed to explore this.

Have any of you ever felt like these magi? Have you ever felt that you were on a strange journey – to search for God? Have you ever wondered just how much further you have to travel – how far away or how near God is to your reach?

All their star-gazing took the magi a good distance, all the way to Jerusalem...but then they got stuck. They needed more information. They go to King Herod’s court and ask the religious scholars and theologians of the day concerning prophecies and where that should lead them.

The wise men were able to take the scriptural texts from Micah and Samuel that Herod's religious scholars provided and find directions to a holy destination – Bethlehem, where they finally discover young Jesus.

Herod did not make this journey with the magi. When he heard that they were looking for a Jewish King, he tried to get as much information as possible from them in order to find this child, asking the magi to tell him where he was when they found him. His intention was to murder this would-be child King.

King Herod waited for the magi to send him the location of this newly arrived baby that some of his advisors had predicted would be the new King of the Jews. But, the magi, having been warned of the King's murderous intentions in a dream, head home by a different road, taking their knowledge of Jesus' identity with them, and avoiding Herod altogether. Herod, not hearing back from the magi, ordered the murder of all of the first-born male babies in the region.

But here's the crux of the matter: those magi, these strange foreign outsiders, decided to embark on a whole new destination. They went home by another road.

That singer-songwriter James Taylor wrote a song about the wise men called, "**Home by Another Way.**" Now, don't worry – I'm not going to sing it for you. I won't put you through that kind of torture!

But the song opens like this:

*"Those magic men, the Magi,  
Some people call them wise,  
Or Oriental, or even kings.  
Well anyway, those guys  
They visited with Jesus  
They sure enjoyed their stay.  
Then warned in a dream of King Herod's scheme  
They went home by another way.*

*Yes, they went home by another way  
Home by another way  
Maybe me and you can be wise guys too  
And go home by another way."*

And the bible and our faith agree with James Taylor. Going home by another way or another road can be the sign of great wisdom. Even though travelling by another road may be far less convenient and far more dangerous, there are times in life when the other road is precisely the way to go.

This morning we're invited to come to the manger with the magi. And like them we are invited to go home by another road.

Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, is when we celebrate the story of the magi. How the light – the knowledge of Jesus – was made known to them. This is Epiphany Sunday. And this year, the Sunday just before Epiphany is also the day after New Year's Day – a time that is also a time for us to re-set and re-examine.

So, come on this first Sunday of the New Year, and make that journey of faith with the Magi. And listen closely to God as God leads you home by another road.

Let me guide our thoughts and make this vow a prayer: This will be my prayer and my New Year's Resolution:

Each day, when I awake, I am going to acknowledge that this is a part of the best year of my life, ever! There were times when I wondered if I would make it to today; but I did! And because I did, I'm going to **celebrate!**

In 2022, I'm going to celebrate what an unbelievable life I have had so far. I am going to accept with gratitude the many blessings that came to me last year. And I will accept the hardships too -- because they will serve to make me stronger.

I'm going to leave behind all the mistakes and bad choices I have made. I'm going to leave behind all the hurt and pain caused by others, and the bitterness that often accompanies that.

I will go through 2022 marveling at God's seemingly simple gifts – the ice and the snow, the morning dew of springtime, the summer sun, the clouds, the trees, the flowers, the birds, the flame-coloured autumn leaves. In 2022, none of these miraculous creations will escape my notice.

In 2022, I will share my excitement for life with other people. I'll give a sincere compliment to someone who seems down. I'll tell a child how special he or she is, and I'll tell someone I love just how deeply I care for them and how much they mean to me.

This is the year I quit worrying about what I don't have and start being grateful for all the wonderful things God has already given me.

I'll try my best to remember that to worry is just a waste of time because my faith in God and his Divine Plan ensures everything will be just fine when it matters.

As the day ends and I lay my head down on my pillow, I will thank the Almighty for the blessings of my life. I will sleep contented with the expectation of knowing

that tomorrow is going to be...

The Best Day of My Life in the Best Year of My Life!

Will you make that your prayer with me this year?

This New Year, let's stop and take stock of where each of us is on our journey. Let's stop along the road, take a rest, and seek directions from God.

This is a brand-new year. Take a chance with God. Start on another road. And see where it gets you.