

## HOME BY ANOTHER WAY



*Scripture:*

**Matthew 2: 1-12**

### *The Visit of the Wise Men*

1. In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,
2. asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'
3. When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;
4. and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.
5. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
6. "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel." '
7. Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.
8. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'
9. When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.
10. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.
11. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
12. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Psalm 29, A Psalm of David**

#### *The Voice of God in a Great Storm*

1. Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
2. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor.
3. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters.
4. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
5. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
6. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.
7. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
8. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
9. The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'
10. The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
11. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!



## WISE MEN WISE CRACKS

There are a lot of jokes floating around this season about the wise men.

Someone was wearing a t-shirt at church this season that said, "Three wise men? You've got to be kidding." I chose not to pick a fight by calling it tasteless, but I will say that I didn't see any men wearing t-shirts saying they were on the lookout for three wise women.

Here's an e-mail: John, do you know what would have happened if it had been three wise women instead of three wise men?

They would have stopped to ask for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, made a tuna casserole and brought practical baby gifts.

I'm not sure how much these insights help us understand the scripture about the Magi and their arrival on the holiday that we celebrate at Epiphany. But they tell us something.

## THE THREE WISE LEADERS

I was remembering the year that we did not have three boys of the right age in the youth groups for the Christmas pageant, and so we selected some girls in the roles. I had to doctor the script I was writing, and so we described them as the three wise leaders. We kept the traditional names of Balthazar, Melchior and Gaspar for the wise leaders, but we decided that what was important is that they were looking for the Christ child, and that is what made them wise. In fact, the search was as important as the finding. In my play, I had them arguing about not being able to find the manger, and missing an important turn on the way into Bethlehem. But Gaspar had the most important line: "Wise ones," he said, "you must remember we are on a great mission. Let's quit our arguing; we have something more important to do. We are in search of the Promised One of God. We saw His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

## HOME BY ANOTHER WAY

The search is just the first part of the story. But the second lesson is the long journey home. The travelers had been warned that Herod would use the information about the child to destroy the child

whom they told him would be the new king. Herod would destroy the wise leaders, too. How sad when the people who have such good intentions fall victim to those who had such bad intentions. So, the wise men returned home by another way.

By some accounts the journey of the Magi to the manger may have taken as many as two years. Yet the journey from the manger may have taken even longer, and was every bit as difficult. People who experience a truly religious experience never return home by the same way and in the same way. Some experiences change you. If the road we travel is symbolic of the life we lead, then how many different roads have you traveled to bring you to this moment in your life? How many times have you had to change course for your own safety, or just to follow an ever-changing dream of a life worthy of living? Plenty.

So here is a challenge. This morning, no matter what it takes, I want you to go home by another way. Don't do this because it makes good sense, do it because you are on a religious quest. You are not looking for the fastest way home, you are looking for the most interesting way home.

- We have some people who attend our church who live in Rohnert Park, and Petaluma. What if you went home through Sonoma today?
- For those who live in Oakmont, how about taking that back road past Spring Lake, or through Bennett Valley.
- If you live across town, how about a trip up Brush Creek Road, and over Riebli Road?
- If you're going home to Fountain Grove, why not stop for breakfast at The Omelette Express in Railroad Square?

Whatever you do, I hope you will do it safely.

## WHY DO THAT?

- Because it is easy to get stuck in a rut, a new way home will remind you of that.
- Because complacency is the natural enemy of spiritual growth.
- Because it is Epiphany, and we are celebrating the journeys of the Magi, and you never know what you will discover if you stop and look at life in a new way.

If you have a good experience send me an e-mail.

**We are never so alive as when we are looking for new solutions to a problem, reading a new book, and looking at life from another angle.**

### **STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING**

by Robert Frost

**Whose woods these are I think I know,  
His house is in the village though.  
He will not see me stopping here,  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.**

**My little horse must think it queer,  
To stop without a farmhouse near,  
Between the woods and frozen lake,  
The darkest evening of the year.**

**He gives his harness bells a shake,  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep,  
Of easy wind and downy flake.**

**The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.**

Like most of Robert Frost's poems, we can read this poem on several levels. Or we can just ignore them all. At one level, this poem is melancholy, filled with a metaphor of sleep or death. But at another level are the sensory images of quiet, the sweep of wind, the downy flake, new adventures, and new resolve.

#### **A journalist said -**

I love this poem. This is my favorite out of all poems. I can relate to it and love to review it, especially when hard troubles set in my life. That poem always touches me deeply to not give up, but to move on for there are things still to be done.

#### **Another person said -**

This profound poem is about our lost connection with the natural world.

Our ego bound activities take over our entire adult life. No time to appreciate the natural world.

No time for activities that have no specific reason to admire nature. Even the horse senses there is something wrong with stopping in these woods because the horse is trained by humans.

#### **While another said -**

This poem is about whether to live or die. And it concludes that there is much more to be done if we will take a look at life in a new way.

### **A CHANGE OF PLANS**

The Magi went home by another way with new resolve. We don't know if they got home, we don't know what happened while they were traveling, we don't know if the second half of the journey was more dangerous than the first. We just know that they changed their plans. And we know that their journey home must have been every bit as interesting as the journey to the manger.

Because they changed their plans, they lived to tell the story. And what a story it was: they were the first people outside Jesus' family to discover the Christ child. The magi are you and I, who are received at the manger as warmly as if we were blood relatives.

Living people have to change their plans. When we do, we live to fight another day. When we become rigid, we become brittle and break. We get backed into a corner. Never vote for a politician who says, "I have never changed my mind on the issues." Given the evolution of knowledge and information in the last ten years, the idea of never changing your mind is the most frightening political statement I can think of.

In fact, it is because of a change in plans that I am speaking to you today, and not Peter Maier. Peter, I am sorry that your home was burglarized, and that your automobile died and went to heaven – or perhaps not heaven from the way you have described it. But, Peter, your destination is the same as ours. Thanks for calling on us when we are sick. We want to love you as much as you love us.

### **HOME HAS NOT MOVED**

Our destination is heaven – the place where we experience the presence of God – and there are many ways to get there. The blue highways are much more interesting than the freeways. Be as grateful for the back roads as you are for the

beltways. Much of life happens on the way to somewhere else.

In the New Year, once in a while, let's be sure that we go home by another way.

I need to stop now. I want you to think about the road that brought you here today, and the road that you will take when you leave. We have come through a busy season; there has been illness and their has been death. We need to have some time for prayer and meditation.

And yet there has been joy and blessing and new hope. And we need time to smile.

You are a child of God, and a disciple of Jesus Christ. Your home has not moved, it is where it has always been. So make your journey home interesting.

Just for today, slow down for a few moments. Be like the wisemen, and go home by another way.

Althea, will you give us some music as we think about the road that brought us here, and the miles we have yet to go before we sleep.

### *MUSIC*

*Going Home Theme – from the  
New World Symphony by Dvorjak*

### *AFTER THE MUSIC*

**Go placidly amid the noise and the haste,  
and remember what peace there may be in  
silence.**

**As far as possible, without surrender,  
be on good terms with all persons.**

**Speak your truth quietly and clearly;  
and listen to others,  
even to the dull and the ignorant;  
they too have their story.**

**Avoid loud and aggressive persons;  
they are vexatious to the spirit.**

...

**Beyond a wholesome discipline,  
be gentle with yourself.**

**You are a child of the universe  
no less than the trees and the stars;  
you have a right to be here.**

**And whether or not it is clear to you,  
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.**

**Therefore be at peace with God,  
whatever you conceive Him to be.**

**And whatever your labors and aspirations,  
in the noisy confusion of life,  
keep peace in your soul.**

**With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,  
it is still a beautiful world.**

**Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.**

Credit: Max Ehrmann, 1920's



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