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“Home By Another Way”

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Matthew 2:1-12

The story of the visit of the Three Magi to the newborn Christ child
vividly captures the imagination.

Poets as diverse as William Butler Yates

and William Carlos Williams have given verse to this story.

Others, such as James Taylor, and John Hopkins have set the story to music.

And hundreds of painters and sculptors have depicted their journey, from Botticelli
to Di Tomme’s *The Adoration of the Magi*.

Somebody said that those Wise Men traveled more miles for Hallmark Cards
than they ever traveled to actually get to Bethlehem!

(John Killinger, *Losing the Star*)

We feel like we know those three men.

Longfellow even gave them names: Melchoir, Caspar, and Balthazar.

They have become an essential part of the story of Christmas, and are quite
impressive for their ability to recognize Jesus before most folks ever did.

Much has been made of this story, about which we actually know very little.

It occurs only in Matthew’s Gospel and no place else.

Matthew is vague, telling us some wise men from the East went to see the child—
never specifically saying that there were three of them or that they were Kings.

It was assumed that because they had three gifts, that there were three of them,
but we don’t know for sure.

They could have been two astronomers from Persia,
or four astrologers from Turkey.

We do not know precisely who they were, or exactly where they were from.

But the historical details do not matter that much.

What matters is that these very important men caught a vision and so they went:
they dropped everything to follow a star.

This beautiful story suggests several things:

that some important people were impressed enough

by this birth to travel a great distance to worship a child.

They traveled over a thousand miles, a trip that would have taken, weeks or even

months in those days.

It tells us that because these wise men were Gentiles, foreigners and outsiders,
this child had the power to overcome such differences.

And the image of a star suggests that even mother nature herself could not be
indifferent to such a momentous birth.

They were captivated by a celestial light, so they set off for Jerusalem.

Once there, they begin asking around,

“Where is this child born king of the Jews? We have come to worship him.”

King Herod got wind of this, and it upset him very much.

So he summoned these foreigners, and asked about their mission.

He directs them to Bethlehem, but made them promise to come back to Jerusalem
afterward, and report everything to him.

So they set off for Bethlehem, where they found the child, and presented their gifts.

Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they chose a different way home.

They understood that Herod meant to harm this baby, since he would be a threat.

So these visitors from the East went home by another way.

I think these wise men capture our imaginations because they were filled with three
things: faith, optimism, and courage.

They were, in the words of one commentator, “...star struck and travel ready.”

They caught a magnificent vision, and it caused them to drop everything

They believed in their mission, and trusted God would help them fulfill it.

And, then, they went home by another way.

It occurs to me that their story is our story too.

We have just returned from the manger, where we have visited God in the flesh..

We have rejoiced together over a God who became human like us,
claiming once again that eternal promise of faith, hope, eternal life, and love.

But now, we have to go back home by another way.

Because things will never again be the same for our church.

Our journey into this New Year is going to require faith, optimism and courage.

We too have to be “...star struck and travel ready.”

John Killinger has said, “Life isn’t rootedness, and it isn’t settledness.
It is a journey, a movement, going from one place to another.”

You who are members of this church are facing a momentous decision today.

I intentionally say “you” and not “we,” because I will not be voting.

It is up to all of you to determine your future as a congregation.

I have been praying about this for many months,
and you need to know that members of our prayer chain have also been
praying for you individually by name as you consider these important matters.

Like so many of you, I have mixed emotions because I love this church.
I have experienced God in this place, and spent some of the most rewarding years
of my entire ministry here. You are my friends and have become extended family.

I would like to hang on to this forever and have nothing ever change!
But I also know that we are called to change, to change the world for Jesus Christ.
We are called to make disciples, not to do what is convenient or comfortable.

We have many issues which we must address.

But we have been diligent about our efforts to transform this church.
Your Staff and Lay Leadership have completely reinvented our Sunday School,
developed a dynamic Youth Ministry, placed a strong emphasis on Missions.
We have stayed current with contemporary worship, music and Video Screens,
signage and advertising. We’ve emphasized hospitality, evangelism and outreach.
We are not reaching enough people with our transforming, life changing ministry.
Whether we move, or whether we stay here, things are going to be very different.

They have to be different.

Your elected lay leaders decided last year that this church could not continue
with business as usual. We had to make some drastic changes.

If we stay here, we must become a community center for the neighborhood.

But, if we stay here, we must put several million dollars into this facility.

We need a new roof, which currently has asbestos tiles.

We need a new heating system, which is the original one installed when this

church was built, and it is not in good shape at all.

We need to install a sprinkler system throughout the building,
by mandate of West Metro First Protection District.

And then we get into asbestos issues, which are never simple or cheap.

Now, you have already approved those existing improvements.

At our congregational meeting last June, you voted to proceed with the renovation of this building. But in your great wisdom, you also charged the Visioning Team with exploring what relocation would look like.

Before we put any money into this building,
you wanted us to study relocation and let you know more details about that.
And so that is what we have done, with the help of Coover-Clark and Associates.
You are soon going to see what relocation would look like, since that is exactly
what you charged the Visioning Team with exploring.
But I feel incredibly wistful today, because the church we have known must
change.

Whether we stay here or move, it will be a different journey for us all.

I have really enjoyed this year and our celebration of 125 years of ministry.
All year we have learned about the distinguished history of this congregation,
starting with those pioneers in 1881 who met in a farmhouse for Bible Study.

I believe we have honored their memory and been faithful to their vision.

I believe they are smiling down on us now, giving us their blessing.
This congregation has met in at least nine different locations, under at least five
different names, always reaching out with the love of Christ to a world in need.

And with God's help, we will continue to do that wherever we are.

May God grant us faith, optimism and courage as we face the unknown future.

Let us get ready to follow a star into this new year
as we go home by another way.