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Title: Home by Another Way

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Text: [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

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[Watch the service](#)



On this first Sunday of 2021, we celebrate the day of Epiphany, which occurs on January 6. Epiphany is the conclusion of the 12 days of Christmas and marks the biblical account of the three magi or three wise men following a star that ultimately leads them to Bethlehem to a divine encounter with the newborn savior.

It is a story from the Bible that is well-known to most because it has appeared in countless books, depicted in various forms of artwork and song, and the three magi have a prominent place in every nativity scene.

However, we know very little about these three magi or three wise men, or three kings. They aren't kings, Matthew doesn't even tell us that there are three of them. We don't know who they are, where they came from, or how long it took them to get to Bethlehem. We aren't even sure how old Jesus is when they arrive.

And yet...the power of this story speaks to us and has something to say to us. Several years ago, Time magazine did a special article on the nativity scene and when speaking of the magi, they were described as people who help express Christianity's openness to the far-flung and the unlikely. They are outsiders to whom the holy child is revealed. They are models to us, following the star that leads to Jesus, and once having this divine encounter, going home by another way.

The calendar has changed to 2021 and it is fair to say that all of us are grateful to see a new year. We are ready for a new possibility and new direction.

I have to believe that like you and I, these magi are ready for new possibilities and new direction. They were wondering what the future holds and perhaps even pondering who holds the future. We are probably

wondering what the future holds and after a difficult year, maybe you too are wondering who holds the future.

As the text goes, they see a star in the sky, and they wonder what this star means, where this star may be leading them. They aren't certain so they head to Jerusalem, because everything important happens in Jerusalem. It is the center of power. They go to see King Herod, but he doesn't know, he hasn't heard a thing. But Herod is curious. For a long time, there was the word of a Messiah coming, and Herod is threatened. He has heard about a child, so he sends the three magi to find out and report back to him.

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. Matthew 2:8 (CEB)

I'll let you in on a little secret, Herod has no intention to welcome this child into the world. Herod was not exactly a nice guy, nor was he interested in what this child would have to offer the world. This child would be about peace, justice, mercy, grace, and love for the entire world. Herod was about power, greed, violence, and oppression. Two competing visions of life, two competing ways of life.

But still, the three magi go, finding the star once again.

Many years ago, I was with a group in Nashville and we wanted ice cream. I remembered this great local ice cream place that was only a few blocks from where we were staying that I had been to before. I had this map in my head and I didn't want anyone's help with getting there. So we walked and we walked, and we walked. Soon, a few blocks had turned into a mile and a half. I refused help. Finally, we arrived and when we arrived, we arrived at a hot dog stand. See, I had also been to a hot dog stand in Nashville before and the route I had vaguely remembered turned out to be the hot dog stand, not the ice cream place.

As I led the group, I started to have the feeling I was headed the wrong way, but I kept going. *Sometimes we get so set in our ways, set in our beliefs, set in our opinions of others, set in how we see the world, that we can't imagine seeing differently.*

You may be heading into a new year, ready to make a change, yet to do that, to live a life more in line with the life God intends for you to live, you must learn to not be stuck.

We can't live in a new way while being set in the old way.

As the three magi arrive in Bethlehem, they find the holy child, and they are overwhelmed with joy.

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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Matthew 2:11-12 (CEB)

Do you see what happens here?

They encounter Jesus. And this encounter changes everything.

Everything has changed for them. Old patterns of life no longer hold any value to them.

They cannot go back the way they came.

They must go Home by Another Way.

As they meet Jesus, their lives are set on a new course.

Craig Barnes is a good preacher and theologian, and he brings this point to light- He says that it is a popular illusion that it's only up to you to assemble your life and that can only be done through the choices you make. If your life falls apart in one place from one choice we make, then we just make more choices to rebuild our lives. And if this life is still vaguely dissatisfying, then we look for a little spirituality. Looking for spirituality is not a bad thing at all, except we then do it on our terms."

The problem that Craig Barnes describes is that we are acting like we are our own creator. We created ourselves from the beginning and we believe we simply have to continue creating our own lives. I wonder if that is why so many of the resolutions we make at the beginning of a new year, ultimately fail.

What we truly need to thrive in this life is to be connected to the God who created each of us.

We also need to be connected to a community of people who are also connected to the God who created each of us.

I believe that this encounter the magi had with Jesus, with the holy, changed everything. This encounter made them recognize that they had been seeking and searching for the wrong things in life, things of their own making, until this moment.

The old patterns of living, the old ways of finding solutions to life's greatest challenges no longer held up.

If they are to get home, truly home, at one with their God, then they must go another way.

Today marks a new beginning, not because the calendar has changed over 2021, but because we have had an encounter with the holy. We have seen and we have received the gift of the Christ child.

A new course has been charted for our living.
And God is calling you home by another way.

Let us pray together.