

Home By Another Way

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Date: 30 December 2021

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

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[2 : 30] Thank you.

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Thank you.

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[4 : 59] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

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[8 : 35] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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Thank you. Thank you.

[12 : 01] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

freedom. Thank you. Thank you. God of new beginnings.

today because we love you. The world will tell us to keep our money and our talents to ourselves, to hold it tight, to tuck it away. But just as the Magi made a different choice, we make a different choice. Instead, we give what we have, trusting that when we live like we belong to one another, we will see a better world. So take these gifts and use them for your good. With hope we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

[15 : 40] So we come to a time of joy and concerns. Does anybody have joys or concerns that they want to lift up today? So new babies, which is very exciting.

Kelly. Two quick things. Prayers for kids headed back to college and just a thankfulness for all the musical talent in this church, especially those two gentlemen who come to play. It's a wonderful job.

Yes. Thank you. Will you pray with me, please? God of the way, we all have roads that we travel. We travel emotional roads.

The narratives we tell ourselves, the mental places we revisit again and again, the assumptions and the fears that we know by heart. Then there are physical roads, the places in our lives that we walk every day, the grocery stores and coffee stands, trains and carpool lines, and then the roads of our society. The paths that are carved out that we're expected to follow.

Dress and etiquette, education and rules. So many things unspoken, but built in stone all the same. So today we remember the Magi who traveled who knows how long down a dusty road to get to you.

[17 : 28] Holy God, we want to be the people that travel mental, physical, and cultural roads to get to you. We want to gather in your sanctuary. We want to remember you in our prayers.

We want our hearts to know the way home, the way back to you by perfect memory. Help us get to that place, for we long to be journeying towards you.

In addition to the road the Magi traveled to you, we also remember the road they took home, a road home by another way. God, when the world cries out for violence and vengeance, show us the road, show us home by another way. And when the world cries out in scarcity and fear, show us the road, show us home by another way. And when we find ourselves on a path that could hurt us, show us that road, show us home by another way. God, we are walking this life as a journey.

Be on our steps that we might be led to you. Be in our eyes that we might see you. Be in our hearts that we might be brave enough to go home by another way. In your name we pray. Amen.

Good morning. There's a prayer for illumination before the scripture today.

[19 : 16] Holy God, you speak to us in scripture and in prayers, in sunrises and sunsets, in friends and in strangers, in dreams and in songs. You are speaking all the time. And how often do we miss it?

Still our minds so that we can listen with the depth that we have not heard before. Still our hearts so that we can receive with open arms what it is you are offering us today.

We know you are speaking, so we are listening. Gratefully we pray. Amen. And the scripture today is from Matthew 2 verses 1 through 12.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

[20 : 19] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written.

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

After they had heard the king, they went on their way. And the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

[21 : 33] And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. This is the word of the Lord. Amen.

Speak to God. Would you join me for a moment of prayer, please?

Loving God, we give you thanks for this morning. We give you thanks for this moment. And as we come today with our hearts wide open, Lord, we pray that you would plant a seed in us. A seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So some of you may remember that on Christmas Eve, I talked about plans and what happens to our plans.

Now, I'm going to bed, and then how many of you are going to show me real quickly? How many of you have, between Christmas Eve and today, already had plans go sideways? Yeah, that's what I figured.

[22 : 53] Because that's what happens to plans, right? Today's story that we are talking about, the visit of the Magi, is another one in which we see plans not really happening the way we would expect.

And as we consider our theme, this idea of coming home for Christmas, when we look at our lives and we have talked about this idea of what home means.

Home for us spiritually. Home for us emotionally. That place where we are safe, loved, and complete. That place we only find in God.

When we talk about getting to that place, our message is today about finding home by another way. When you lay those two things next to each other, it's not hard to connect the dots, right?

Because we make plans, and sometimes we got to find home another way. And how we figure that out? Well, let's pay attention to our story, right?

[23 : 58] All right, so let's begin with a couple of things that we probably need to unlearn about the Magi. Many of us grew up hearing the story of three kings.

But you heard Elizabeth read the story. And when you read the story, the story doesn't say that the Magi are kings. It just says wise men from the east.

Historically, what we've been able to demonstrate is that the Magi were a group of astrologers, studiers, scholars. And so they would pay attention to signs in the sky.

They were very learned scholarly people. And they were advisors to royal courts. They also had the ability to do tricks and do other kinds of things.

It's the same root word from which we get magic. So that's where the name comes from. So that's who they were. Not kings themselves. That's the key.

[24 : 57] Not kings themselves. The other thing that we've gotten used to is this idea of three. That kind of emerges from the three gifts. That people just connected that dot historically.

But the story itself, as you heard read, doesn't tell us how many there were. It just doesn't. But could have been three. Could have been 12. Could have been 100.

We don't even know. I think the important piece for us is to remember that those details are not really the point of the story. The point of the story is exactly what we're talking about.

It's this idea of us and our plans. Because as we are living our lives and we're doing what we think we're supposed to be doing. We're on the path that we expect to follow.

The question of what we need to consider is what will you do when God moves unexpectedly? Because if you're following your plan.

[25 : 58] And even if this is your job. You're good at your job. You know what you do. And then all of a sudden you realize that something extraordinary is happening. That there is a new star in the sky.

And what would a new star in your sky actually make you do? You're going to stick with the plan.

Or do you need to respond to the movement of God? Because many of us when we think about looking for home. And what our hearts cry out for.

What our souls cry out for. Many people say oh God show me a sign. Well then you look up and there's a star in the sky. So the question then becomes well now what?

Do you follow the plan? Or do you follow the star? Well the magi are pretty clear. They follow the star. This is no easy thing.

[27 : 01] Let's be clear. The magi are most likely from Persia. And Persia is modern day Iran with a little piece of Iraq attached to it.

That is a serious trip. Across desert. Most likely hundreds of miles. Would have taken them months to complete. Months.

So they packed up all their stuff. In response to the movement of God in the sky. And let's not forget one small detail. While they understood the God of the Israelites.

They did not worship the God of the Israelites. Yet when they saw the star in the sky. They still felt compelled to respond to it. That's a powerful thing. How many of us.

Would say the same. So they packed up and responded to the star. They knew what it meant.

[27 : 59] That one had been born. The king of the Jews. Jews. So they set out. Following the star. Not entirely sure where it would be.

But they went to the seat of power for the Jewish people. They ended up in Jerusalem. Now this arrival has got to be kind of a thing. Right? So this is Jerusalem.

People are used to powerful people. But when these guys show up. They get everybody's attention. They presumably have considerable means.

Remember they're giving gold away after all. And. They ask. Well where is he? And the people are like.

What are you talking about? Change of plans. Because. Because. Remember. They showed up expecting. To find the king of the Jews.

[28 : 58] So they kind of assumed. The Jews would know. Who they were talking about. And so when nobody does. They're like. Well now what? So the king gets involved.

Because as we said. Their arrival caught everybody's attention. So they talk to Herod. And they tell him. Exactly what they've been telling.

Everyone else. Now. Everybody's. In a bit of an uproar. How is it. They know. And we don't know.

How do we miss that? So the manager. Kind of still going. Well what is happening here? Because we didn't come all this way.

For nothing. We're sure that star in the sky. We're sure that star in the sky. Meant that the king has been born. We believe it. Even if you don't. And so after more conversations.

[29 : 58] They realized that Herod is. Doing something fishy. So they set out from the palace. Presumably with Herod's blessing.

And the star reappears. You know. When I would read this before. I was always kind of curious about this one verse. Right? Because you read it.

And remember. They left. Because the star was already in the sky. But when they leave Herod. If you're with me. We're talking about verse 9 here.

Right? So they heard the king. They went. When they heard the king. Meaning to go find the child. When they heard the king. They went. And look.

The star they had seen in the east. Went ahead of them. Until it stood over the place. Where the child was. And here's the verse. That always used to intrigue me. When they saw the star.

[30 : 55] They were filled with joy. And I used to be confused by that. Because remember. They left. Because the star was already there. Here's the thing I want us to consider.

When we talk about changing plans. Because now. The magi have hit Jerusalem. They've had this interaction with Herod. And things feel off. How many of us.

When we. Are thinking we're on the path. We're supposed to be on. Doing the thing we're supposed to be doing. Looking for home. For our hearts. The way our hearts always cry out. For home.

We get involved with the world. And the world starts putting these other ideas. In front of us. And we're like. This doesn't feel right. Something doesn't exactly match.

The way. This is supposed to work for me. And yet. When you leave the world behind. And you go back. To the sign you heard from God.

[31 : 53] What happened? According to the magi. When they left Herod. They saw the star again. And. They were filled. With joy.

Let that sink in for a minute. Because when the world gets in the way. It takes you off course. And it steals. What you are trying to find.

And when you go back. To the star. When you go back. To God's leading. You get back in touch. With the joy you were seeking.

So off they go. And it takes them. To what. They were looking for. Still not entirely sure. What's going on. Right. They just know.

They can trust. God's leading. That's a powerful thing. When you're looking. For home. To really trust. God's leading.

[32 : 52] Because. They just know. We're headed this way. We heard about this town. Called Bethlehem. But. Who knows how many houses. There are in Bethlehem. And that's another thing.

We need to kind of. Unlearn about the magi. Pastor Kathy. Talked about this. A couple times ago. She said. You know. When we looked at our manger scene. We're used to seeing. The magi there. It was very unlikely.

They arrived. On the night of Jesus birth. That they most likely. Showed up months. Perhaps even years. Later. That when you look. At the original scholarship.

It tells you. That the word. That they used there. When it says. They found the child. That was used. In reference to. A sort of toddler age. Child. Not a baby. Child.

And so. That's why. When you look at. Herod's order. To kill children. Up to two. It all sorts of. Adds up. That way. So. It would have been. A little bit of time. It also tells us.

[33 : 50] They went to the house. Not necessarily. The barn. Right. So. There's. Cues in there. That we can look toward. Reason why I'm telling you. All of this. Remember. They don't know.

Exactly where they're going. They still need to trust. God's leading. And to find. The right. Person. To find.

Jesus. Himself. Remember. They don't know. Who they're looking for. Who knows. How many random. Two-year-olds. Could have been running. Around Bethlehem. But they found.

Exactly. Who. They were looking. With. God's. Leading. As your heart.

Cries out. For home. As your heart. Seeks for that place. As you continue. Looking for. What only God.

[34 : 47] Can give. Trust. God's. Leading. Leading. Because when they find. The child. They immediately fall down.

And worship him. They bring him the gifts. They give him the gifts. That they were there. To give him. They found. What God.

Had sent them. To find. That's a powerful thing. And I want us. Especially as we stand here. At the beginning. Of a new. Calendar.

Many of us. Coming into this year. With a sense of optimism. Hoping that things. Are going to be new. And bright. And everybody. Creates their list. Of what they're going to do. Different. And all those sorts of things.

But let's also. Keep it real. Given what we have seen. Over these past. Couple of years. Many folks. Kind of hit 2022. With this little. Sense of dread.

[35 : 47] Everybody knows. That we're still not done. With the problems. We've been facing. We're not sure. Where any of this. Is going to take us. And that sense of. Crying out for home. Is very real. Maybe as you hit this year.

You're looking for. A new sense of peace. Because there's just. So much happening. So many problems. So many issues. So many this. So many that. And your whole sense of peace. Is just.

Is just not right. Maybe you're hitting 2022. And you're thinking about. I need my hope renewed. Because I've seen loss. I've seen sadness.

I've seen too much change. And I don't know exactly. What I'm looking forward to anymore. Maybe you've lost touch. With that sense of your joy. That that sense of.

I know I'm with God. And I know God is with me. And no matter what's happening around me. I can trust the truth. That I've been taught. And that fills me. With this unspeakable sense. Of joy.

[36 : 44] And maybe because. We've simply wandered away. From that center. We're not feeling that anymore. Our hearts. Crying out.

For home. And so we keep looking. We keep searching. But I want us to not pass up. The big obvious.

And real truth here. Because everything. The magi were looking for. They found. In little boy. In Bethlehem. That's what they were looking for. That's what they came to find.

They knew it when they left. And I'm hoping. That that lesson sinks in. As all of us are looking for home. Home. Is where. God is.

Aim for nothing else. If we're trying to find home. In the world. We're going to be disillusioned. We're going to lose hope. We're not going to find peace.

[37 : 42] Because the world can't deliver those things. Only God can. And if you're searching. Anywhere else. Or if you're searching for. Anything else. Please.

Redirect. Look at the star. That God is sending you. No matter what it looks like. For you. Because we all don't get the same sign.

But we do. All get signs. We all don't get the same message. But we do hear. The same God. And no matter what your path is.

That path leads back. To. Home. And home. Is where he is. So.

Having found. The child. They worship. They give. And they know. That they have fulfilled. The mission. They are there. To do.

[38 : 40] But. This challenge. Comes up. Because. The Magi. Had been directed. By the king. Find the child.

Then come back to me. And let me know where he is. And. God. And God. Sends another message. Another. Change.

Of plans. Because God says. This is not. Your path. This isn't right. Go home.

A different way. Go home. A different way. Go home. A different way. That's not.

Always easy. As we've said. Just in the last week. Many of us have had. Things not go. According to plan. Hopefully. These are not big things.

[39 : 39] In my life. Things not going. According to plan. This week. Have all been. Sort of minor inconveniences. Nothing. Significant. But clearly. All of us. Have had significant things.

Happen in our lives. That were not. The plan. However. God reaches out to you. To say. It is time.

To change course. Whatever. Message. God sends to you. That says. Follow. Me. However. God says. No. The path.

Is this way. Now. Keep your heart open. And follow. Where he leads. We have heard.

That message. We have seen it. In our lives. We have read it. In story. After story. The hard part for us. Is can we find the courage.

[40 : 35] To do it. Can we live in that place of love. And faith. That lets us listen to God. When the world is telling us. To do something else.

It's never easy. If it was easy. If it was easy. We do it all the time. It's never easy. The hard part for us. Is to take the lesson. From the magi.

Because the thing. That really hits me. About this story. As I read it through. This time. Is this idea. Of are you going to come. From love. And faith. Or are you going to come. From convenience.

Because clearly. What was happening. To the magi. Was not a matter. Of convenience. None of their story. Is about convenience. Because as we said.

They packed up. And literally crossed the desert. Hundreds of miles. To go worship. A king. They were not intending to serve. They just knew. He was a king. They knew.

[41 : 34] That his kingship. Was inspired. By something. In the sky. And that was so powerful. To them. They said. We have to respond. That's certainly not convenient.

They go. To Jerusalem. And they find a king. Who they know. Is up to something. They know. This clearly. Isn't right. They still stay on course. Looking for the child. They could have just bailed.

And said. Well maybe we got this one wrong. But they kept. Looking. Coming from a place. Of love and faith. Instead of convenience.

They didn't map out. The destination first. Before they decided to leave. They just followed. The star. Certainly not convenient. And then.

We get to this final act. Where they know. They're going to defy. A king. Who is ruthless. Ruthless. Herod was known.

[42 : 34] To be ruthless. And all you got to do. Is read the next verse. To find out. How ruthless. He can be. Because the killing. Of the innocents. Comes next. Christ. So.

They decide. To come from a place of faith. Now most likely. This route was going to take them longer. Than the route that took to get there. And remember. They crossed the desert.

For hundreds of miles to get there. And now it's going to be. A longer way home. Because they were going to be faithful. Not doing what was convenient.

Home by another way. Church. However. God is reaching out to you. Right now. Whatever your heart is screaming for.

Longing for. Know. That home is the destination. Home is where God is. It will rarely.

[43 : 42] Be easy. Inconvenient. But it is. Always. Right. And worth it. Will you be willing.

To come from that same place of love. And faith. In order to make your way home. Even if it isn't. According to your plans.

Friends. Because trust me. Even if it doesn't feel like it right now. And maybe this is your first time with this.

And if it is. I want you to trust those around you. For whom it's not their first time. And even if it's not your first time with this. However you are grappling with it.

Hear it again. Home. Home. Is where he is. And even if it's not convenient. It is right.

[44 : 40] And it is worth it. Come home. This Christmas. Amen. And amen. Loving and gracious God. We thank you so much for who you are.

And the way in which you move. And work in us. And through us. Please continue to call us. And lead us as only you can. Please continue to shepherd us along with love.

Please give us the eyes. And the ears. And the heart. To find those signs. Whenever you send them. That when you put a star in our sky.

That we will see it and respond. That when you move in our dream. We will listen and obey. That when we find you. Find the thing you have sent us to worship.

Find us the one. Where you want us to go. And we will simply obey. Help us always be motivated by that love. And that faith for you.

[45 : 38] More so than what is easy or convenient for us. Lord God. You know what is right. And you are always worth it. Help us.

As only you can. To follow wherever you lead. Following the example. Of these brave souls. Who did just that.

Amen. Amen. As you heard me say, talking about the Magi, we don't have to imagine hard that walking to Bethlehem was not easy, that following a star for navigation was definitely not easy.

However, I imagine the hardest part was probably not knowing where the road would lead. Friends we know we are not always the best versions of ourselves when we are faced with uncertainty or changing plans.

Facing the unknown pulls on every ounce of our anxiety and fear. It rings all of our stress alarms and can erode our patience, our calm, and our sense of perspective.

[47 : 25] Fortunately for us, we worship a God who is gracious beyond imagination and meets us on every twist and turn of the road home.

So let us pray together now, knowing that even in our worst moments, we are held by God. God of change plans.

The Magi heard in a dream that they were to take a new way home, a different path, an untraveled road. And to our amazement, they did just that.

The Magi packed their bags and went home by another way. We wish change could be so easy for us. But more often than not, when whispers of change come, we tend to clench our fists and hold on tighter.

Forgive us for resisting change that might be holy. Forgive us for ignoring that there is more than one road home. Forgive us for failing to hear your invitation.

[48 : 35] Guide our steps to unfamiliar places. Gratefully we pray. Amen. No matter which roads we take in this one wild and precious life, God walks with us.

God never leaves our side. When the road changes and we find ourselves on a new path home, God is always there.

So hear and believe this good news. No matter where we go, no matter what we do, we are claimed, loved, and held by God.

Thanks be to God for a love like that. The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts.

Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give our thanks and praise. It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, the one who knows our needs, the one who lights our path, the one who puts stars in the sky for us to follow, the one who is waiting for us when we follow the path where it leads.

[50 : 14] And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven. Father's grace, one component. Everything Human. Human.

This injury baked water and earth for us then or the other's glory. ■ I believe the motion of people calling to sing my knowledge or prayer of God inch estiver in the air of heaven and earth. While us ask God your name for us to join us, ■■ our hearts and collective members, and Peter therefore gave grace of our heroes because we will be braver and with Jesus that we have and resurrection you gave birth to your church delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit and on the night in which he gave himself up for us Jesus took bread he gave thanks to you he broke the bread and he offered it to his disciples and he said take and eat this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me and when the supper was over he took the cup he gave thanks to you and he gave it to his disciples and he said take and drink from this all of you for this is my blood sign of the new covenant which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin every time you drink this do so in remembrance of me and so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith Christ has died Christ is risen Christ will come again pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts bread and cup make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood by your spirit make us one with Christ one with each other and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet through your son Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in your holy church all honor and glory is yours almighty God now and forever and now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen ma'am ma'am those who are serving this morning join us down front please

Amen. Amen.

Amen. The tale is set and the Lord calls.

[55 : 59] It's all about who he is, not who you are. So come and receive his gift. We ask you to use the center aisle, come to the front, receive the elements, and then exit by the side.

Amen. Amen.

Holy, holy Lord God almighty, worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Highest praises, honor, and glory be unto your name.

Holy, holy God almighty, holy is the Lamb who was slain. All his praises, honor, and glory be unto your name. Be unto your name. Be unto your name. Be unto your name.

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