

“Finding our way home”

1. “Don’t go home the same way you came here”
 - a. The story of the Magi, with its mystery and enchantment, ends with that warning which the Magi paid attention to
 - i. It’s an abrupt ending which comes because they faced danger if they returned the way they had gotten there
 - ii. Their journey had started far from where Jesus was born
 - iii. Their interpretation of the heavens let them know that this one star, this one celestial body meant there had been a significant birth: the birth of the king of the Judeans.
 - iv. They made their journey and went where you would expect new kings to be born, the palace in Jerusalem.
 - v. But there were two problems:
 1. That’s not where the Jesus was born
 2. And the current occupant of the throne was the insecure, vindictive and violent Herod
 - vi. Herod gets really worried, but doesn’t let the magi see him upset
 - vii. Herod finds out from his own people that the prophecy had been that Bethlehem, the city of David, just down the road was to be the place where the new king would be born.
 - viii. Herod gives them the right information (secretly, so as not to encourage others to join the search?), but then he lies to them, saying he too wanted to meet this new king in order to pay his respects
 - b. The magi eventually did find their way to Jesus with the help of the explained prophecy, but mostly because of the star (and in spite of Herod’s evil intentions)
 - i. Consider this kind of a state visit of foreign leaders, with all the formality and gifts
 - ii. At least that would have been the perspective of the Magi, who would have certainly been confused by the humble setting they found Jesus in, by the unassuming parents, and the secrecy of it all
 - iii. We know they brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which is why tradition at some point decided (thought it’s nowhere in the passage) that it was three of these sages, and that they were somehow heads of state (thus the hymn we sing for the day of Three Kings)
 - c. The experience impacted the Magi. I would argue that the Magi left Bethlehem transformed
 - i. They would have experienced Mary and Joseph’s earnest hospitality
 - ii. In a way their perception of what God was up to would have shifted as they would have asked more about the unexpected circumstances of Jesus’ birth
 - iii. And most of all, perhaps, was that the Magi received in a dream that warning I referred to earlier.
 - iv. Their safe return (and the narrow escape of Jesus and his family following this story) depended on going home a different way. A different route, away from danger back to the place they called home.

2. When we face moments of transformation, it's not so easy to head back to the familiar, to the same-old-same-old. We may need to find a new way back home.
 - a. Star Sunday is our tradition to mark Epiphany, the day of revelation, when those sages (and the rest of us), learned of God's plan.
 - b. As we begin 2025, it's hard to know what will be the impactful moments when God will get our attention, which will help us grow, which will be moments when God reveals something new to us.
 - i. Sometimes we can see them coming.
 - ii. Once I took an unforgettable trip to Kenya as part of a church delegation for three weeks (back in 1999)
 - iii. Before I headed out, a wise teacher and elder of the church, Bev Boomsma, predicted this would be a transformative trip. "From here on out," she said, "you'll mark your life as before Kenya and after Kenya."
 - iv. She was right
 - v. There may be moments like that waiting for us this year, moments which from then on we'll mark life as "before" it and "after" it.
 - c. To be fair, it's likely that we aren't looking for a revelation or a transformation: we just want things to go along on an even keel. Boring feels appealing sometimes...
 - i. But like with the Magi, it's not always our idea or our timing to reach a life-transforming moment, positive or negative.
 - ii. Today's star words for the year may be an opportunity to ponder how God may be nudging us into action, or into reflection
 - iii. But please be also open to the times which may come this year when it's more than a star word, but it's a moment of coming face to face
 1. with God's love through the caring actions of a friend or stranger,
 2. with God's forgiveness so you're finally able to forgive yourself
 3. with God's grace so you give yourself the time to heal from grief
 - d. All of those nudges or encounters will be transformative.
 - i. But pay attention, so you don't miss the signs in the heavens,
 - ii. or the moment of awareness,
 - iii. or the warnings in a dream.
 - e. The journey back from that moment may be just as important.
 - i. Let that love, forgiveness, grace, or that word on your star, do its work in you.
 - ii. Let it be a moment all of its own.
 - iii. And as you make your way back to the familiar, don't take the usual steps, the usual thinking, but find a different path back,
 - iv. so when you arrive at the familiar it will look different, YOU will feel different, arriving as a wiser parent, a more attentive colleague, a more humble human, a more patient friend.
3. Finding our way back home, back to our reality, will require us to perceive life from a new perspective, having traveled new roads in that return, and admit to ourselves we've been changed, acknowledge that God has changed us.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/epiphany-of-our-lord/commentary-on-matthew-21-12-14>