



Minister
Dan Yeazel, preaching
Kim Johnson

Epiphany of the Lord
January 8, 2006

Matthew 2:1-12

A Different Way

Intro to reading: Our passage this morning is the familiar story of the journey of the Magi, who are commonly called the Three Wise Men.

In C. S. Lewis's story and now a movie The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, four English children magically pass through an old closet and find themselves in another world, called Narnia. The cruel and evil White Witch rules Narnia, where it is "always winter, never Christmas." (Always winter: I have friends in warm places who think that describes Minnesota!)

The arrival of the four children in Narnia fulfills an old prophecy about the return of Christmas and the thawing of the earth. Lucy, Peter, Susan, and Edmund unknowingly become bearers of good news of great joy to all of Narnia. They slowly find themselves becoming involved with and actually part of the destiny of that new world.

Word gets out that Aslan, the noble lion, "is on the move." The inhabitants of Narnia find themselves, for the first time in many years, full of hope. In a scene from the movie version of the book, one of the creatures of

Narnia senses the retreat of fear, and says, with growing awareness, "Hope weakens the witch's power!"

The good news about hope is that it weakens any power that threatens to hurt or undo us. Incarnation is God's way of taking hope to where it is most needed, in every time and in every place, in your life and in mine. On that night long ago in Bethlehem, God puts flesh and bones on hope and tells Mary to name it Jesus.

Those of us who follow the one born of Mary find ourselves invited into that hope at Christmastime. Each year as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of the child, but also the birth of something in our own hearts that awakens in us the anticipation of a new day on earth. It may be a long winter, but Christmas does come, hope does establish itself on earth, and this world, frozen as it is in fear and insecurity, does thaw.

Last week we read of Anna and Simeon who waited for the consolation of Israel. When people asked What child – whose child – is this? They knew. All prophecies about the Messiah make clear that the one whom the people have long awaited, will come not merely for a small group, or for one nation, or for one particular religious community, but for the entire world. The hope this child brings is for the whole world.

Then any child is born there is much hope and expectation. There's a hundred-year-old story about a country doctor who came to a farmhouse one night to help deliver a child. As the mother labored, her husband assisted the doctor by holding up a gas lamp to illuminate a makeshift delivery room. After a time of courageous labor, the mother delivered a fine baby boy. Then, to the surprise of both parents, the doctor announced that a second child was due to arrive. And, indeed, the mother delivered a lovely daughter. Her husband was already shaken by this unexpected turn of events, so you can imagine his surprise and astonishment when he heard the doctor say, "Hang on. I think there's a third. I think we have triplets." At this, the father began to back out of the room. "Hold it!" called the doctor. "Come back here with that lamp. "Oh, no," said the father. "It's the light that attracts them."

Matthew tells us the story of the wise men and how years ago they were attracted by the light of the star. The journey the wise men took is an example of faith for us today, and a model as we enter the New Year. The wise men set out with one goal, one resolution if you will; their focus was to experience the

sacred presence of God. They wanted to see the baby who was born King of Kings and they took a number of risks. Following the star and God's message, they set out on a life-changing journey. They were on a search for truth, they were on a search for the one who would bring lasting change.

The Magi were astronomers, star gazers, who were the scientists and the thinkers of the day. They were actively involved in theology. They were counselors, and advisors to kings, and they were King makers. For Magi were the ones to declare children born, to be the right heirs to a throne. In their countries, they were in positions of power. But these three left the comfort and safety of their home lands and searched not asking "Where are we going?" "What's happening to us?" They were asking, "Where is He, where is He, born king of the Jews!" It seems that so many then, and now, don't really want to ask that question! And not many are ready to seek him out.

Others, including Herod had also seen the star. He, too, would have heard that some thought this signaled the birth of a new king. King Herod comes to this question of "where is He?" with a totally different motivation. He consults his experts one by one "Where shall he be born?" And they quoted the prophet Micah; they had the answer: The Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem. The Magi told them about the star.

They had all the facts, and yet no one went from Herod's court to see if it had truly happened. You would have thought that someone would have gone with the Wise Men to check it out, but not one did! One might

say that they had the scriptures in their heads, but not in their hearts. There was no curiosity, only concern that things might change. The Wise Men don't seem to just want to know about Jesus. They wanted to kneel by his crib. They wanted to meet his parents and see his face. They wanted to be right there.

From what we know of Herod's disposition, he would not have taken the possibility of a new king too well. He was something of a powder-keg king and any little thing could set him off. And if Herod wasn't happy, wasn't anybody happy. Verse 3 perhaps says it better, "King Herod was frightened and all Jerusalem with him." All those in Jerusalem knew the oppressive temper of the Herod were afraid of how he would react. His rage had led to the violent deaths of many, including his family. So the traveling wise men had a great deal to risk by even discussing with Herod this newborn King of the Jews.

But the Magi heard a divine call. Something was at work within them. Something greater than the burden of the trip, something greater than their concern for safety. They were willing to bet their lives on the light they received. They started where they were, took what they had and they journeyed on.

How many times do we wait to be really sure before going out to try something new. Or how many times do we close our eyes and say, nope that wasn't really a star shining at me, I need to have a bigger sign, make the star a little brighter for me please Lord, or better yet hit me over the head with it, then

I'll know its for sure. Then I'll change and do something different.

The amazing thing about the Magi is not that they were willing to honor another king, or that they brought gifts from far. It is how they journeyed forward in faith. They were willing to believe that God was doing something in their lives right then, they followed the star and believed that real hope and honest peace is possible. They said yes, it can happen, it is happening and I will be part of it.

Others saw the star, but no one else responded. Others may have said "stars rise and fall, but nothing ever really changes." But the Magi didn't heed their words. They had a light, something was happening in their souls. It beckoned them- here was the wisdom of God. They did not dismiss the signs. They could see the holy in the midst of the common. They saw in the star a chance to see God. They rose up and responded.

Following the wise men, as we leave the Christmas season behind, if we have been touched and moved in some way by the Christ child this season, then we too are called to take a different route home—a different route through this new year avoiding the dangers (and mistakes) of the past, and looking to the future with confidence that "nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God."

We too, are given small gifts of light, may we have the eyes to see, the courage to act on the little signs that point to the reality of God. When we do, we too will begin down a different path, going home, in a different way.

Amen.