



# The Way of the Magi

Matthew 2:1-12

## What does Jesus' birth mean for us?

Jesus is born into a remarkably difficult time in history. Herod is a Roman king ruling with a tight fist and a ruthless temper. He's described as a madman who murders anyone who gets in his way, including Jewish rabbis and members of his own family. He's brimming with ambition and prepared to do anything to satisfy his gigantic ego, and he's disturbed that a king has been born. This poses a threat to his kingdom. Herod shows his cunning duplicity by attempting to employ the Magi to bring him news of this king.

We've gone through the Advent season talking about hope, peace, joy and love while reading global headlines about oppression and violence. There have been a series of marches and protests in our own country as we sort out our own issues of oppression and violence. We may be experiencing illness or loss this Christmas. We may be affected by the economy and really feeling it during the holiday season. We may have faced uncomfortable family situations during the last few weeks, or we may have journeyed through the holiday season alone.

Is there any hope to be found in the strange and humble birth of Jesus during unpredictable and violent times? Does the arc of history so far make you feel like nothing ever changes ... or do you find hope for our time in the events of 2,000 years ago? What does this story tell us today? How does the birth of this child change us?

## How big is your sense of adventure?

Think of Lewis and Clark's expedition or the landing of people on the moon. People have been reveling in exploration since the dawn of time. Now, just as the new year begins, is a perfect time to talk about adventure. In today's story, the Magi set out on their own epic and dangerous adventure. God is on the move!

Did you ever think you'd need a sense of adventure in order to follow the way of Jesus? Is this just a story that happened 2,000 years ago, and it's our job to dust off the Bible and learn about it? Or is the action in this story happening still?

Are you a part of this story? Do you have any idea what's going to happen next? Is this an interactive story? What's your role? Can you help shape the future?

Can you opt out? What happens then? Does opting out change the future, too?

What sort of a God would leave this up to you? How does God work? How big is your sense of adventure? Will you step off the map and follow that star to places you've never imagined?

## What will we leave behind?

As the old year ends the new year new emerges, it's a time to make some decisions about the future. The Magi left their homes and headed off away from what was familiar and comfortable. But in the

process of leaving things behind, they also were able to experience the adventure of seeking the Christ child.

What are we willing to leave behind in order to experience the adventure of seeking the Christ child? What will guide us? Will we be safe on this journey? How do we know? And what does “safe” mean?

How will this experience change us? Can we have this experience of Jesus together as a community? How? What does that look like?

### **What new road should we take?**

The last line of this passage from Matthew reminds us of the story’s danger and challenge: “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi left for their own country by another road.”

As you step into a new year ahead, what does it mean to return home by another road? What about your direction needs to change? What’s the different route home that you’ve got to take into your relationship with God?

What’s the different route home that you’ve got to take into your relationships with others?

Consider Herod’s fear of a mighty king that would threaten his position, contrasted with the vulnerability of a small child born in such a lowly circumstance. Is redefining what we mean by words like “power” part of our new direction? Can we experience the Christ child when our own ego or ambition are in the way? And once our heart changes (think of the Grinch, whose heart grows several sizes!) ... can we ever go back?

### **Where is Jesus now?**

The Magi ask, “Where is the one born King of the Jews?” Should we be asking the same question? Where is Jesus? Maybe the question is more like this: How is Christ at work in us and through us to make a difference in the world? How is God at work in our life together?

When we talk about setting off on a new adventure to experience the Christ child, where will we go? Where will *you* go? What new path will you follow? Where will you step off the map into new and uncharted territory? Where is God calling us?

### **Does this story still speak to us?**

Should we ask only what the story said, or also what the story is still saying? Do we continue to seek a living God? Does God beckon us into a new future? How? How does God create that future?