

Epiphany
Going Home Another Way
Matthew 2:10-11

December 31, 2000
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And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

A Nashville disc-jockey said the other day that had the three wise men been three wise women they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and fulfilled the angel's promise of peace on earth.

Whatever their gender, whatever their impact on the ancient world, it is the closing sentence of this story that I want to center on today--"They left for their own country by another road."

If our spiritual travels this December have any lasting significance they will lead us along new paths of righteousness for the new year. They went home by another road.

I. GOING HOME ANOTHER WAY WAS A MATTER OF MORAL INTEGRITY

A. If you think Christmas is a magical, unrealistic, warm fuzzy from the first century, read the rest of the story.

1. Angels sing of peace on earth good will to all and Herod massacres the innocents. Young Jesus is slipped out of town as screams of mothers fill the streets. Hate was strong. It mocked the song of peace on earth good will to all.

2. Such acts of violence were ordinary occurrences under the reign of Herod. He murdered his wife Mariamne and her mother Alexander. Three sons were assassinated by him. Augustus the Roman Emperor said it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son. Upon his retirement, Herod ordered a collection of Jerusalem's most distinguished citizens be arrested and imprisoned. And he ordered that the moment he died, they should all be killed, so that tears would be shed upon his death.

B. Report back to me was Herod's Command. Wise men had to decide. WILL THEY BE PART OF THE PROBLEM OR PART OF THE SOLUTION?. Perhaps they could not curb Herod's madness but they determine not to cooperate

in his gladness. They go home another way. We can only imagine the risk they take in failing to report their findings to the King

1. Day after day problems near and far are delivered to our living rooms through the media.
 - a. Rage yields to yet another shooting spree
 - b. The massacre of Herod involved 20-30 babies. There were an estimated 25000 partial birth abortions last year.
 - c. 98 persons were executed our state governments last year making only China, Iran, and the Soviet Union executing more people than the U.S.
 - d. 1.7 million of the world's children will die this year from poverty related diseases, most of which we know how to prevent.
 - e. 1 billion people of the world are unable to read a book or sign their name, due to illiteracy.

2. Day by day, in large ways and little ways, whether we intend to or not, we like the wise men of old decide whether we will be part of the problem or part of the answer.

- a. Do we or do we not value life?
- b. Have we or have we not found ways to handle our anger?
- c. Are we or are we not generously giving to the good of others
- d. Will we or will we not do the essential things for family unity
- e. Immanuel Kant--So act that thou canst will the principle of thine act to be universal law.--- If the whole world were just like me, what kind of world would there be?

C. MORALITY IS MORE THAN PUBLIC OPINION OR PERSONAL COMPARISON. The roads we take do make all the difference.

1. To be better than the average is not the question. Two wealthy brothers terrorized the town where they lived for decades. Both were loud, boisterous and just plain rude. They were unfaithful to their wives, abusive to their children, dishonest in their business. One day the younger brother died. So the older brother asked the pastor in the community to conduct the funeral, and insisted that he say in the service MY BROTHER WAS A SAINT. The pastor protested but when he wrote a check to the Church for 100,000.00 the pastor agreed. ---On the day of the funeral the pastor said "Everyone knows the deceased was a wicked man, a womanizer, and a drunk. He terrorized employees and cheated on his taxes. But as evil and sinful as this man was, compared to his brother, HE WAS A SAINT.

- a. The majority never mattered much to Jesus. He never ran an opinion poll to determine his stand. When the crowds were with him he stayed true

to the will of the one who sent him, and when he was all alone, facing a cross, he still prayed “not my will but thine be done.

b. This Jesus who said “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

2. Privacy is not the principle.

a. According to a survey in US news and world report. 93% of Americans believe in God, 75% pray at least once a day, and 70% say that individuals must decide on their own what is right and wrong. Is that not carrying individualism too far? Is it really up to each of us to determine what is right and wrong at a particular time?

b. C-span Alan Dershowitz debate at Harvard on the role of religion in society. Mr. Dershowitz at best a skeptic, more likely an agnostic, says “we can define wrong but we can never know right. Right is relative. There is no such thing as absolute right.” I respectfully disagree. Treating people fairly and lovingly is absolutely right. To do otherwise is absolutely wrong.

c. The worst thing we can do is leave right and wrong up to personal opinion. When I am doing wrong, I condense reality to suit my fancy. I have all kinds of ways to rationalize my behavior and minimize my responsibility. When following some deceit of my own making I am not anxious to know the truth. For as someone said “The truth will set you free but first it will make you miserable.” That’s why truth must be an objective reality far removed from personal opinion.

3. They went home another way, not to run away, but to stand away from the prevailing mood of the day. They would have no part of it. It was a matter of moral integrity.

II. GOING HOME ANOTHER WAY WAS A MATTER OF SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY.

A. They came as followers of Zoraster--they went home as disciples of Christ. Our destination is determined by the tour guide.

1. We live in a era of great spiritual interest and rampant spiritual confusion. These are the best of times and the worst of times. People express their spiritual yearnings in more open ways than I have ever known as a pastor. But they are as likely to take their spiritual direction from their daily Horoscope as the Holy Bible.

2. Rock and Roll guitarist Steven Van Zandt is quoted in Rolling

Stone Magazine to have said “I am a reformed Taoist, part time Buddhist, Hindu, Animist, pagan, Jewish mystic, and Christian. I always get along great with priests, rabbis, and Guru’s even though I spend most of my time criticizing them.

3. Is the Hokey Pokey really what its all about?

B. Once upon a time, a man fell into a pit and couldn’t get out.
Christian scientist came along and said--”you only think you are in the pit.
Charismatic Triumphant came along--”just confess you are not in the pit”
Fundamentalist--you deserve your pit.
Buddha--Your pit is only your state of mind
Hindu--Your pit is for purging you and making you more perfect
Confucius--if you would have listened to me, you would have never fallen into that pit.
New Ager--maybe you should network with some other pit dwellers
Reporter asked--Could I have the exclusive story on your pit?
IRS man said--Have you paid taxes on the pit?
County Inspector--Do you have a permit for that pit?
A realist said--that’s a pit
Idealist said--World shouldn’t have pits
Optimist said--Things could be worse
Pessimist--Things will get worse
Jesus seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

1. Today that same Jesus stands at the center of our contemporary world. He is not here to make an argument, he has come to make an announcement. He has come to give us life, life in all its fullness. Will you let your feet start walking in the direction his voice is calling?

Here on the eve of a brand new year
you really can go home another way.
Here on the eve of a brand new year
You really can make a brand new start.
Here on the eve of a brand new year
You really can walk as a child of the light
You really can follow Jesus.