

Journeys

Matthew 2:1-12 (January 9, 2022)

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2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Historical Context

Until the 4th century, Jesus’ birth was celebrated on January 6. Then, the emperor Constantine moved that festivity’s observance in the Western Church to December 25, the day of the Sol Invictus, whom he worshiped. January 6 then became related to Jesus’ baptism.

Theme: Journeys

In the poem, "Journey of the Magi." T.S. Eliot imagines their journey to have been difficult all the way from beginning to end and that the challenges did not cease for them once they returned home. For they had risked their fortunes and their reputations to travel far --- only to have their lives threatened by a paranoid ruler. What stirred in their hearts to compel them to risk so much?

Simply, those travelers to Bethlehem were living their lives to their natural conclusions. Their life's work was studying the stars, and when they saw a star which held such meaning, all they could do, if they were to be true to who they were called to be, was to follow its direction.

Perhaps this is so for all of us. As we use and develop the gifts that God has planted within us... as we become all we were made to be, with eyes and hearts open, perhaps we, too, will encounter God on the journey as well. And so for those who teach, and those who visit, and those who build, and those who nurture children, and those who clean, and those who heal and those who....well, you fill in the blank. Maybe like those magi from so long ago, our first calling is simply to be who we were made to be. And then to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to when we are called to step out in faith, somehow taking those gifts of God to their natural conclusions. When we follow God's leading, we will encounter God, perhaps in unexpected ways and places, too. And it is also certain that our lives will never be the same again.