

Epiphany 2013

Matthew 2:1-12

I wonder how many of us have had epiphanic experiences. In current times, epiphanic experiences may come after long and extensive research that brings on the sudden revelation or answer to a problem. Like Einstein's theory of relativity or Newton's second law of physics. Or an epiphanic experience can be a major innovation that affects the world. Like the invention of Post-its or the World Wide Web.

So there are secular epiphanies. Those bright light bulbs that we see over the heads of cartoon characters. Kind of like a bright star shining over a person maybe?

Originally epiphanic experiences – epiphanies – were understood in a spiritual context – they were sudden exposures or connections with the divine. We still see those spiritual epiphanies today – in faith conversion experiences, in a sudden connection with that thin place between humanity and God, in a realization that God is indeed the most important factor in our lives, regardless of anything or anyone else. All experiences that bring new light to our understanding of who we are in the greater scheme of things and in belief in the Creator of the Universe.

The particular epiphany we're celebrating today is the one in which some astrologers were confronted with a child who was the incarnation of the divine. They knew about it because they read the stars and were aware of a particular star at a particular position in relation to other stars in the night sky that, according to the story, was over the town of Bethlehem. They knew the child for whom they were looking was important even though they weren't Christians. Their own understanding of the cosmos led them to the house in Bethlehem.

They believed in the messages of dreams as well. In our own story of faith, this is not unusual. Angels came to some of our major players through dreams – to Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and Zechariah. To the shepherds. And now to the wise men – the magi – the astrologers. King Herod was up to no good and the child they had just honored and knelt before was in great danger. So the wise men were to go home by another way. But before they left, they knew that they had experienced an epiphany – a great light, a great bright event that would affect the entire world. And their lives were never the same.

James Taylor, the well-know folk singer, writer, and musician, wrote a song titled Go Home by Another Way. You can go to You Tube and put the title in the search bar and listen to him sing it. But hear the lyrics this morning....

Those magic men the Magi Some people call them wise Or Oriental, even kings.
Well anyway, those guys -- They visited with Jesus. They sure enjoyed their stay.
Then warned in a dream of King Herod's scheme, They went home by another
way

Yes they went home by another way; Home by another way. Maybe me and you can
be wise guys too, And go home by another way. We can make it another way. Safe
home as they used to say. Keep a weather eye to the chart on high, And go home
another way

Steer clear of royal welcomes. Avoid a big to-do. A king who would slaughter the
innocents will not cut a deal for you. He really, really wants those presents. He'll
comb your camel's fur. Until his boys announce they've found trace amounts of

your frankincense, gold and myrrh.

Time to go home by another way. Home by another way. You have to figure the Gods saying: Play the odds, go home by another way.

We can make it another way. Safe home as they used to say. Keep a weather eye to the chart on high, and go home another way

Home is where they want you now. You can more or less assume that you'll be welcome in the end. Mustn't let King Herod haunt you so, or fantasize his features when you're looking at a friend.

Well it pleases me to be here and to sing this song tonight. They tell me that life is a miracle and I figured that they're right. But Herod's always out there. He's got our cards on file. It's a lead pipe cinch -- if we give an inch, old Herod likes to take a mile

It's best to go home by another way. Home by another way. We got this far to a lucky star but tomorrow is another day. We can make it another way. Safe home as they used to say. Keep a weather eye to the chart on high and go home another way.

The thing about these wise men – and the shepherds before them – and so many who came after the birth of this child – is that their hearts were open to not only the *possibilities* he brought but even to the *impossibilities*. The weather chart the magi followed was not one about actual weather – that's Guy Hagi's job. But the charts the wise men followed were above and beyond their everyday lives. Their faith led them to follow the movements of the stars. And actually their faith was based in a science that made great sense to many before them and many still today, regardless of our own dismissals of astrology. (This is not about the daily horoscope next to the comics in the Star-Advertiser.) Their lives were not grounded in the secular but in the heavenly, in the divine, in something they knew was greater than the limits of human beings and creation. Something that warned them about the traps of the world, the Herods and those who followed him and were like him. Ultimately, they made the decision to go home by another way – away from the negativity and destruction and toward the light, the star that guided them to a place where they were safe and welcome and led by a light that was life-giving. A light that took them away from the darkness of those whose intentions were not in the best interests of anyone other than themselves, away from those whose objective was to destroy rather than build up. They were led by a light that took them away from the darkness into a new kind of life that had not previously been part of their world view. But they were open to the possibilities and the impossibilities, and went home by another way.

That's our message this morning. To be open to the possibilities and impossibilities – to the epiphanic experiences – that can bring us out of the darkness and into that ever-shining and dependable light. Or in the words of the 21st century GPS, to recalculate our direction. To go home by another way.

Amen.

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