

## A NEW WAY FOR A NEW YEAR

### Matthew 2:1-12

I kept wondering when Dublin would be extended to Peterson. When traveling south on Powers we would pass Dublin and drive to Stetson Hills to get home. I really didn't like sitting in the turn lane at Powers and Stetson Hills. Cars would race down the Powers hill at speeds that would literally shake your car while sitting in the turn lane. Since it was a double turn lane I would always try to get the inside lane, but then you had cars speeding north. If only they would open Dublin to Peterson I could avoid this traffic quandary.

Then I heard the good news – Dublin was open to Peterson. Now I had a new way home when traveling south on Powers.

Perhaps you have had your spiritual cup filled to overflowing with the Christmas narrative by now. As a pastor I often struggled to build fresh sermons around the Advent season.

In preparing my for this message I was reading of the visit of the Magi and was struck by this verse **Matthew 2:12 (NIV)** <sup>12</sup> **And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

One writer states that few biblical stories are as well known, yet so clouded by myth and tradition, as the of the magi. The only legitimate facts we know about these particular magi are the few given by Matthew. We are not told their number, their names, their means of transportation to Palestine, or the specific country or countries from which they came. <sup>1</sup>

Matthew simply says that <sup>1</sup> **Magi from the east came to Jerusalem** <sup>2</sup> **and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."** **Matthew 2:1-2 (NIV)**

The Gospel does not tell us how the Magi knew that a king had been born and the identity of the star that informed them of the birth is as mysterious as to the readers as the Magi themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentaries Matthew 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 26-27.

The Gospel does make clear that these mysterious travelers from the east came for one purpose, to worship the one who has been born king of the Jews.

It must have seemed strange if not shocking to the Magi that no one in Jerusalem knew what they were talking about. The Gospel implies that King Herod scrambled to find out what in the world the Magi were talking about. He assembled the religious leaders, experts in the scriptures and Jewish traditions, to make sense out of the inquiry from the Magi.

**<sup>4</sup> When (King Herod) he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Matthew 2:4-6 (NIV)**

The response of the religious leaders to such an inquiry from the King and the reaction of King Herod to the revelation seem a bit odd. Why would the King ask such a question? What does this mean? Should we investigate this inquiry? Why did Herod meet secretly with the Magi? Was Herod trying to hide the Magi from the religious leaders? Why didn't he send servants to follow the Magi? We don't know the answer to questions such as these.

We do know that **<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Matthew 2:9-11 (NIV)**

Upon leaving Herod the Magi were overwhelmed with joy by the reappearing of the star. It led them to the house where the infant Jesus was. They knelt and worshiped him and presented him with gifts of status and love.

**<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Matthew 2:12 (NIV)**

What does this beautiful narrative say to us today?

God will lead us to Christ.

On the journey we will meet people who are hostile toward the Gospel message and we will meet others who are indifferent to the Gospel message. We should not let them impede our search for the Christ.

When we discover Christ our response will be worship, adoration, and gratitude.

Having encountered Christ we will return home a different way as a different person.

**<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)**

So, what does this New Way for a New Year look like to me?

Is it about resolutions? You know the typical ones: to read your Bible more, to pray more, to witness more, to eat less, to weigh less, to spend less. This is all well and good. I mean who could fault us for wanting to be more disciplined in our faith and life habits.

I believe it is more than resolutions. It is about transformation – being restored into the image of Christ himself.

The new way home is the way of holiness – of Christlikeness. It is to: <sup>37</sup>  
**''Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)**

The new way home is about loving God unreservedly and loving others unconditionally.

In 1980, the day before Christmas, Richard Ballenger's mother in Anderson, South Carolina, was busy wrapping packages and asked her young son to shine her shoes. Soon, with the proud smile that only a seven-year-old can muster, he presented the shoes for inspection. His mother was so pleased that she gave him a quarter.

On Christmas morning as she put on the shoes to go to church, she noticed a lump in one shoe. She took it off and found a quarter wrapped in paper. Written on the paper in a child's scrawl were the words, "I done it for love."<sup>2</sup>

"I done it for love," a new way for a new year.

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1986), p. 186