

## **Which Road Would You Take?**

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – Matthew 2:1-12)

The Magi take a long, long journey. Two thousand years later we call the moment they reach its end, Epiphany. The word 'Epiphany' means manifestation or sudden appearing and I guess that is what happened for these men that led them on a journey, they saw an unusual star in the sky. Epiphany commemorates God appearing to the whole world, to Gentiles in the form of a tiny child. An appearing for all time, for all people of God in our midst.

This story is only found in Matthew's gospel. Beginning in modern day Iraq or Iran they see a star that collectively they know holds significant meaning. We don't know exactly who they were or what they did, but they seemed to study signs that appeared in the sky – movements of planets, stars, comets and the like. This sign was so significant they took a road trip that lasted a couple of years to find out what it all meant.

What a road trip – leaving families behind, enduring all kinds of weather, dealing with stubborn camels, the ridicule of others who thought they were mad. Did they wonder what on earth they were doing? Did they want to give up? Did they encounter dangerous situations as they travelled through other countries?

Collectively they became convinced that the rising of this star signified the birth of a new King. So of course, they take the road to King Herod's palace, assuming that is where a new King would be born.

Did they see the jealousy in Herod's face? Did they really believe he was interested in the child or just playing a political game and using them to rid himself of any rivals?

They followed the star as it lit up the night sky and would indeed shed a new light into the world. Finally, they get to the end of the road and find among a couple of young parents in a shed out the back on the outskirts of town.

Reaching their destination they offer gifts. Did they wonder how suitable they were in such a situation? They had brought expensive gifts, as they assumed they would be in the midst of a grand palace with a wealthy king.

The gifts they had brought with them were for a king – gold, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for burial, not a poor family in a small house. Yet, those gifts might just have become really useful, for a young family forced to flee to another country to escape a tyrant king – gold, frankincense and myrrh being very valuable would enable them to pay their way whilst in exile. In time they would understand just how significant their choice of gifts were – gold for the King of the world, frankincense burnt in the temple with one's prayers signifying God is with us, and myrrh for suffering.

Whatever they encountered, at the end of that road, they bowed down and gave honour to the child and his family. Yet they had not reached the end of the road, in a dream they are told to avoid Herod at all costs, and take another road home. A new road to keep them and Jesus and his family safe.

I wonder what happened next as they made their way home. What did they discuss on the long road back? Did they try and put together all that had happened and the significance of the child they had encountered? Did it change them? Did they sense

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they had truly encountered God? Did it make their journey worthwhile? We will never know, except, that somehow the story has been told and retold and reminds us that God comes into the world for everyone. A Latin American theologian interprets the story in this way - 'that's the trouble with God, he does not let you leave as you come. He sends you back, stripped of your presumptions making for home by another way.'<sup>1</sup>

What about us? For the last six weeks we have been thinking about the impending birth of Jesus and its significance for us some 2000 years later.

How does the idea of God's incarnation into a world like ours change you? How does an encounter with the Prince of Peace change you?

What road will you take into 2025 and how will the events of the last few weeks shape that journey?

May this story where foreigners find love and peace in the face of a child in their search for truth, and are changed forever, inspire you as you reflect on the Christmas story. May you too be guided in your search for truth. May you too be curious. May you not be too focused on the destination, but concentrate on the journey, and all you learn as you undertake it. May you have courage and tenacity to follow through on your understandings. May you resist the ridicule of others. May you not fear the wrath of enemies. May you bring your gifts and abilities to God and offer them in His service. May you know that God's love extends to all people, in every place and every age, and may you go out practicing such inclusive love in the year ahead.

May you all be transformed again and again as you encounter God in the life of Jesus, and may God continue to reveal Godself in all you do and in all you meet.

May you too become an Epiphany, a revelation of God's love and transforming power in the world. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cloth for the Cradle p. 126