

# “The Journey to Jesus”

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Matthew 2:1-12

Rev. Kimberly Heath  
Wall Street United

Today is Epiphany, the day we remember and celebrate the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child. You've probably heard the joke of what would have happened if it had been Three Wise Women instead of Three Wise Men?

1. They would have asked directions
2. Arrived on time
3. Helped deliver the baby
4. Cleaned the stable
5. Made a casserole, and...
6. Brought practical gifts!

There is a lot we don't know about the Magi. There is a lot of folklore surrounding the magi, who they were, where they came from and so on. What I am curious about is the journey they took to see the child. Why did they do it? Why did they set out on a long journey following a star to find this child? They were known as wise men and I am sure that these wise men had wise and important things to do.

They had stars to gaze at and ponder and calculate, and they probably had laundry to do (or perhaps the wise women were doing that)... regardless, I don't doubt that their lives were busy, so why did they decide to take time out from their busy lives to take this journey? If their goal was to experience God, could they not have done that at home? Why did they need to go somewhere else to experience God?

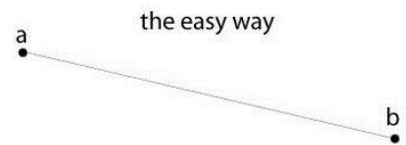
I can't tell you the number of times I have heard people tell me excuses about why they don't come to church: "I don't have to go to church to experience God — I can experience God at my cottage or on the golf course". They are right; sort of. God is everywhere. Churches certainly don't hold the patent and exclusive rights to God. God can be experienced in the most unlikely places, like in the middle of a maddening traffic jam, when all of a sudden a peace comes over you, or in a hospital room or shopping mall or yes, on a golf-course.

But there is something about going out of your way to find God that makes it more likely that you will.

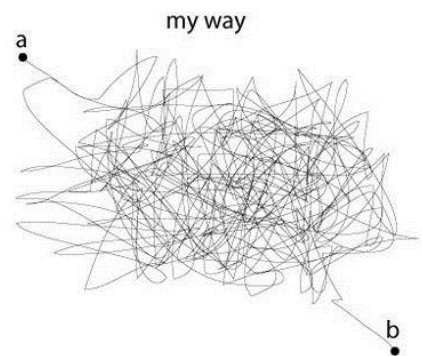
In Matthew 7:7 Jesus says: “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” It is possible to stumble upon God, and for many your first encounter with God seems almost by accident — but if you really want to find God or if you want to deepen your faith; then go out of your way to ask, seek and knock.

The Magi made a career of doing just that. From astrology and prophecy, they knew that a very special king had been born. I imagine that they could have paid homage to this king at home in some kind of ceremony, but it wouldn't have been the same. The journey was part of their homage, part of their gift to the child. The time and the effort and the great cost was part of their tribute to this king.

We picture a journey as straightforward, looking like the first picture (*to the right*), from point 'a' to point 'b' — but more often than not it looks like the second picture. And that's ok! We live in an impatient society where everything we want — everything from mattresses to faith — should be direct-to-consumer. Click a button and there it is! But the important things in life don't tend to be so easy or direct, and that's ok.



I think of how Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a treasure that is hidden in a field. A man who seeks that treasure sells everything he has to be able to buy the entire field, just so he could get that tiny section that holds the treasure. I'm sure he would have been happier to be able to buy the one-meter square section of the field and simply and precisely buy only the land that had the treasure, but that's not how it works. Sometimes you have to buy the whole field at great cost to yourself to find that small but priceless pearl.



I don't know why some people have more pain and heartache in life than others. But I do know that if you give God your pain and heartache, he will transform it and you. God does not cause the suffering, but God will use it to bring greater life to you and others if you let him. And if that pain and heartache can help you to find the pearl that is faith — then it will have been worth it. If you have to lose everything to find it, it will have been worth it — for so great is the value of a real faith and relationship with God.

As wise as the wise men were, their incredible journey also included some wrong turns that could have gone very wrong. The Magi came seeking and asking: *“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?”* Naturally, their seeking led them first to King Herod. Chapter 2 begins: “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born...” we are reminded right away that Jesus was born under and in a time of tyranny.

Our world is full of king Herods who are power-hungry and threatened enough by ‘others’ that they cause a tremendous amount of injustice. Remember that shortly after the Magi left, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and they fled as refugees to Egypt while King Herod ordered the killing of all baby boys under the age of 2 in Bethlehem. I couldn’t help but be reminded of that when I saw an editorial in the *Island Packet* – the newspaper my parents get when they are in South Carolina. It talked about a tweet by Larry L. Sandigo. He’s an immigration lawyer in Arizona who works pro bono for a non-profit legal services organization called *the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project*. The tweet went like this:

*“In court this morning, I asked the judge if my client could wait outside. She was being fussy. He said yes, and she was carried out. Even then, I could hear her whimpers and cries. She’s two years old. She had on a pink coat. Today was her [#deportation](#) hearing. [#arizona](#)”*

This was retweeted over 48,000 times.

When you make the journey and find the treasure, your eyes are opened and you see more clearly the treasures of the world (that don’t look like treasure) and the tyrants of the world who look like they are or have treasure. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* becomes your prayer.

I don’t doubt that what the Magi found was nothing like what they expected to find. After all, they started looking in the palace but found him in a much more humble location (It was not likely in the stable that the Magi found Jesus; almost certainly they arrived long after the first few nights with the shepherds and the animals. The passage we read talks about a house and a child – so maybe it was a year or more after the birth.) But even if he was nothing like what they expected — nevertheless they knew they had found the one they were looking for. I know this because the scripture says:

*“On 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.”* Matthew. 2:11

It no longer mattered that it wasn't what they thought they were looking for, it mattered only that they had found the Light of the world. Ask, seek, knock — but don't cling to finding exactly the treasure that *you have in mind*, — instead be open to finding the treasure that *God has in mind for you!* The treasures we seek more often than not break, get lost, become too small, let us down, betray us, and sometimes even destroy us. God's treasure leads to abundant life. You can seek other treasure, but seek the treasure of Jesus first and you won't be disappointed.



How have you gone out of your way to find God? I know that some of you have done pilgrimages whether to the Holy Land or to other sacred places. I have walked part of the pilgrimage of St. James — the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*. I think it was a decade ago this coming spring, which is hard to believe!

Have any of you walked the Camino or part of it? A friend of ours, Jamie, took a month to walk the full Camino — the pilgrimage that starts in the western edge of France and goes across northern Spain and leads to the city of Santiago. He walked 737 km with only his backpack, a map and a book to guide him.

People go on pilgrimages for all sorts of reasons: some just want a good walk, but most have deeper reasons for doing the pilgrimage from needing to heal, find forgiveness or to find God. Our friend went hoping to solve all sorts of life issues, and went into the experience very intense and focused on solving and on having a major experience. As the journey progressed, he began to realize that for him it was not about solving this or that, but about letting go and simply being. At the end of the journey, he was absolutely overcome and overwhelmed by “thankfulness for the grace of life”.



This deep, deep gratitude for life just filled him and overpowered him. He was struck by how simple this notion was — gratitude for life — and yet how incredibly powerful it was, as it changed his life forever. When I asked him about experiencing God on a pilgrimage, he said it was like drinking

coffee in University: “If you don’t drink coffee when you start university, by the end you will be drinking a little. If you drink coffee when you start university, by the end you’ll be drinking a lot more”. He believes that if you do a pilgrimage with no experience of God, by the end of the pilgrimage *you will have an experience of God even if it is small*. If you have had some experience of God before you begin the pilgrimage, *by the end your experience will be many times magnified*. Jamie admitted that what he learned on the pilgrimage came from all of his life experiences, but somehow intentionally doing the walk and the journey gave clarity and even an epiphany, a moment of great insight, to what was already inside. Jamie went out of his way to experience God and to find some answers for his life and he did; but in different and more powerful ways than he ever expected. He told me that he was completely humbled by the power of God. *There is something about going out of your way to find God that makes it more likely that you will find God and God will find you*.

How will you go out of your way this year to find God? I encourage you to begin reading the Bible more regularly. Perhaps this will be the year when you read the whole Bible in one year. Booklets like The Word for You Today are helpful, or a even buying a One Year Bible where it is set up in daily readings. Perhaps you need to begin a prayer journal or go on some kind of a retreat.

Maybe it’s simply a commitment to come to church on Sundays. Perhaps you will seek God through Christian meditation or Bible Study or through a couple of new groups that you will hear about soon. Choose one thing — one new and specific habit or group you will attend. In a moment of silence, ask God how he would like you to seek him this year. Going out of your way to experience God is never easy, but the effort is part of the gift you offer, and it is often in the effort that you experience God.

After the Magi found the child they were seeking, they returned home ... but everything had changed. The last part of Matthew 2:12 reads: “They left for their country by another road”. There was a practical reason. They had been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod — but the new road home also seems deeply symbolic. Having seen the child, the Messiah, the holy one of God, they were changed, and so the journey changes for them. They could not go back the way they came because they were different. Ask, seek, knock: but know that it will change you and affect the way you see the world.

God is so very near to us, but our world and our lives become so filled with busyness and distractions that it is easy to miss God. Don't wait for life to calm down to seek God out – it will never happen. I encourage you to be intentional in your search for God because we desperately need that relationship to remind us of why we were created, who we are and who God wants us to be, and to help to work towards a world that is more and more filled with light and love.

Our whole life is the *real* pilgrimage, the real journey to find the Christ Child. We have been put on this earth to learn how to love and to walk closer to God. It is not a long journey. For some it is 80 or 90 years, but for many it is much shorter. Soon our pilgrimage will cease. My hope and prayer for you is that when your pilgrimage comes to an end, you will be humbled by the power of God and overwhelmed and overcome with gratitude for the grace of life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.