



## January 4 – A different way home

Fear can make a person do crazy things. It is not always rational. I remember a time when my brother Al and I watched a scary movie involving vampires. We shared a room and both were overcome by an irrational fear of fictional characters. So, we did what any teenager would do; we took garlic from the pantry, made a bunch of Lego crosses, and hung traps all around the room before going to bed. On another occasion, I spotted a black cat crossing the road as I was driving home. I did a three-point turn and found another way home. We lived in the country. This meant a four-mile detour.

Sometimes, what fear demands of us is a little comedic. Other times, it is not funny at all. In this text, we hear the story of King Herod being consumed by fear. He is so fearful that he may lose his power and authority. When he is greeted by the Magi, he sends them out to find the child in the hopes that he might eliminate the threat. After the Magi do not return, this leads Herod to wiping the youngest and most vulnerable in Bethlehem.

The Magi arrived because of hope. They had traveled from the East, likely traveling from Persia. They are astronomers who notice a change in the stars and follow the star. If they are from Persia, the story of the Judeans sounds far too familiar. Persia was overtaken by Greece under the campaign of Alexander the Great. These influences from the West took over their culture. They longed for a time with indigenous leadership. With that in mind, you can almost see that sense of hope that led them to Bethlehem.

As they visit Jesus, they are visited and are told it is not safe to return to Herod. The star had guided them to Judea, and they felt it important to check in with the local leader. Now, they are stuck in between hope and fear, between Jesus and Herod. What now? Faith and hope had led them to witness the Christ child and pay homage.

This story is a good reminder of the dangers of putting our faith and our journey in the hands of human leaders. The Magi follow along with what Herod asks until it becomes clear that they are about to cross a line. They listened to their hearts. Herod may have led through fear, but he could not stop hope. The Magi found a way to see Jesus. They made it. The empire could not stop hope. While they realize they cannot return to Herod.

There are times in life that are more like this story than we would like to admit. There are times when we end up somewhere we did not want to be, whether that is because we put trust in the wrong person or it was our own self-ambition that led us to that place. Other times, it may be the messaging of the world, telling you that you are not enough and may never be enough. You start to chase something, whether it is a look, a relationship, a promotion, or material wealth.

We can learn a lot from the story of the Magi. They follow the star and find Jesus, but along the way find themselves in danger. What do they do now? I like the way James Taylor puts it in his song, *Home by Another Way*, “They Visited Jesus. They sure enjoyed their stay. Then warned in a dream of King Herod’s scheme they went home by another way.”

The Bible does not say what the journey home looked like. We don’t know if it was easy or treacherous. We only know that they pressed on and found a different way home with the stars as their guide. This story teaches us that there is always a way forward. You don’t have to get stuck or feel like you must return to a dangerous situation.

Nothing can take away hope. We witness the love of God in the incarnation, even when the empires of the world create culture of fear. Hope cannot be stopped. And if we find ourselves in a place we do not want to be, we look to the stars, and we find our way home by a different way. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt