



Another Road

January 4 • 2009

Focus Scripture Matthew 2:1–12

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 60:1–6

Psalms 72:1–7, 10–14

Ephesians 3:1–12

Prepare us, O God,
to welcome the
events and people
that mark turning
points in our lives.

Stir our imagina-
tions to honour
the dreams that
send us in new
directions. Give us
courage to fol-
low Christ's call to
take another road.
Amen.

Epiphan^y, the season we are about to enter, comes from a Greek word that means “manifestation.” During this season the church celebrates the gift of Christ for all people. We rejoice that God is revealed among us in unexpected places and persons. We rejoice that God comes among us in Jesus. With wise ones, we rejoice that God chooses to act in our lives.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 2:1–12

The Christmas story in Matthew differs greatly from the Christmas story told in Luke. There are no shepherds, but there are *magi*. Magi are not kings. “Magi” refers to a priestly group in ancient Persia and Babylon. Their work combined elements of astrology, astronomy, and dreams. “Wise ones” is a more accurate synonym than kings. Matthew gives no indication of how many magi there were. The three gifts may have been a key factor in the popular notion of three magi. Any number, however, is pure speculation.

The magi were Gentiles. They may have connected this star's appearance to a Jewish king because of contact with Jews who remained in Babylon after the end of exile. But nowhere is there any suggestion that the magi are Jewish. In Matthew, the “most Jewish” of the gospels, this is an important detail: outsiders (Gentiles) have come to seek the Messiah promised by God.

Herod reacts with fear to the news of this baby's birth. Herod the Great was known for extensive building projects in Jerusalem, including the temple. But Herod was also known for ruthlessness. Herod had one wife and two sons killed, in addition to many political rivals. Herod died within a year or two of Jesus' birth. In those final years, his paranoia was infamous. A new king, even though an infant, was perceived as a clear threat.

Matthew tells that Herod instructs the magi to report Jesus' whereabouts to him. But the magi are told in a dream to not return to Jerusalem. They disobey Herod, and go home by another road. Long before, Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh out of respect for God (Exodus 1:16–17). Their civil disobedience gave protection to Moses. The magi's defiance gives protection to Jesus.

The details of this story illustrate how Matthew's community understood the events of Jesus' life as grounded in Hebrew Scriptures. The threat from Herod echoes the story of Pharaoh and the child Moses (Exodus 2:1–10). In both cases, a child is saved from a tyrant's intent to kill, and the child grows up to lead God's people. Matthew 2:6 quotes Micah 5:2 to reveal that Jesus comes as the promised one of God.

God's glory is for all people. The prophet, in **Isaiah 60:1–6**, declares that “nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” “Your” is likely a reference to Jerusalem, as it would be restored after the end of the exile (536 BCE). The Hebrew word translated as “nations” here is the same as “Gentiles.” The prophet speaks of God's power to reshape God's people as they return by another road.

In **Psalms 72:1–7, 10–14**, the psalmist prays for a wise and just ruler who will keep God's promises on behalf of those who are usually “left out” – those who are poor, needy, and oppressed.

Ephesians 3:1–12 reveals information about the “mystery of Christ.” First, God's chosen people includes the Gentiles, who are full members of the Body of Christ. Second, the church is to make known the wisdom of God, grounding their action in bold and confident faith in Christ.

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When God's powerful voice beckons us down another road, it is a call to embrace the gift of Christ for all people. Such journeys may lead to unexpected places and persons in order to welcome all in the name of Christ, and to be a beacon for those who are often left on the margins of society. When has faith called you to take another road? What wisdom do these texts reveal about what it means to follow God's leading?

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