

**You can tell that it is the beginning of a new year
by looking at all the ads.**

We see ads for fitness equipment and gyms,
on the one hand, and ads for storage solutions on the other.
We've all resolved, at least the ad makers think,
to get organized and get in shape.
That all we want to hear is that
Whether physically or organizationally,
we want to be "looking good."
It is an obsession for some, a necessity for others.

But today, we are talking about being a different kind of looker.
Our Gospel reading is full of lookers.
It is a familiar text, and isn't Christmas over?

And now here come those Johnny-come-latelies, the wise men.

In our desire to have a nice story that flows together,
We homogenized it here and put it all into
one manger scene tucked under the tree.
But Luke says nothing of the wise men,
and Matthew never mentions the shepherds or the manger.
It is as if they are telling completely different stories.

We don't know how much time has elapsed
between the angel's proclamation and the shepherds' appearance.
Some argue that as many as two years have passed.
Based on the assumption of Herod's actions
after the wise men left for home.
But we don't really know how much time has passed.
It could be a long time; it could be less than we think.
But some time has passed, because Mary and Jesus
have moved from a stable into a house.

The important element, for Matthew anyway,
is that the lookers found what they were looking for.
They got off track for a while visiting Herod,
which makes sense when looking for a king.
But they were seriously in danger of losing their way.
As long as they were following the star, they were doing great.
But when they stopped to pay a social call, they got in trouble.
Matthew's point is pretty clear.

We need to be good lookers,
and we need to look where God is leading.
And those wise men, those sages, those magi,
found what they were looking for in Bethlehem,
in Judah, just as the prophet had predicted,
just as the Scriptures said.
And even though they were far away
from the safety and protection their own homeland would afford,
they made the decision based on a dream.

Matthew says **to go home by another way—**
defying Herod's request and risking his wrath.
They must have realized that the choice,
that adjustment could have cost them
their lives had they been caught—
that they might never make it home again;

I believe that when the magi got up from the cradle,
there had been a change in their hearts and attitude.

That once they had cast their eyes on the child
who would change the world, they became different men.
They were not the same men who left their distant home.

Home invokes many things in each of us,
all mixed with memories, emotions, hopes, and dreams—
for a place of rest and respite—permanent or temporary—
of safety and security, of growth and challenge.
Home can be a tent, a house, or a town, a geography,
a church, or the love of people we find in those places.

The poet Robert Frost said **“home is that place that when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”**

Sometimes home can become a fleeting
image of a time that is long past—that cannot be reclaimed.
Ultimately, home is an idea that represents a deep
longing within ourselves that can never quite be
completely realized with bricks and mortar.
Home is where our heart is.

You have been home to me, Susan, and Hannah & Austin
starting into our 5th year in February.

You took us in during a strange, scattered season.
All out of the rhythms of our usual move, and it was a hard start,
we didn't even have a home here until July.
you loved on our daughter in her wreck in the first couple of weeks here,
And we have worked together,
have been taught by a pastor and fed by a farmer.
We have laughed and cried over what life has brought
into our home here, especially over the past month.

What the Magi, the Wise Men, these non-Jews,

found by the light of that star, is that once the Messiah
had come into the world, he became our true home.
Jesus was not only the reason they went home by another way.
He *became* their home by another way.
Jesus, our incarnate God, is our true home—
the true source of our safety, our security,
our growth, our rest, and our respite.
By the incarnation of Emanuel, our “God with us,” we are always home.

There are many things I have learned from the Wise Men

but these are some that I think will help us all
on our new journeys as followers of Christ this year.

First point the Wise Men **began their journey because of their beliefs.**
They were looking for a long-awaited sign of the birth of an extraordinary king.
May God give us all inspiration for this new year's
journey and new start ahead in our own lives and together here.

Second point - **God led the Magi.**

There was a star, and no one was responsible for it but God.
We are not asked to create our own stars.
We don't have to lead ourselves in the darkness.
Over and over again, the Bible
tells us that there is light available.

That leads to the third point - we do have a decision to make.
God doesn't send stars to yank us onto the path.
We have to look for it, and **we have to decide to follow it.**
God doesn't want puppets; God wants followers.
So, we follow.

And that leads us to the fourth point –

God keeps leading whenever we decide to follow.

God didn't abandon the wise men when
they stopped in to ask Herod for directions.

It was the star that got them where they were going, not Herod's advice
and **the Wise Men were willing to follow what they had seen into unknown territory.**

Their journey took them outside their country
and their comfort zone, risking the consequences of disobeying Herod.

The Christian journey is often an off-road excursion,
rocky with unknown twists and turns.

And the last point

the Wise Men were committed to the journey-whenever the star might lead.

In this coming year, may we look to God for guidance
and comfort, and may we see God's blessings
in whatever form or direction, we find them.

We are reminded that their choice to go home by
another way made it possible for the Christ Child
to be carried off in a hurry
to a new home by another way
of hope and promise, away from the wrath of Herod.

The Magi return home, but they would return a different way,

with a different outlook on life, on God, and on humankind.

They had their attitude adjustment.

How about you? Do you need an attitude check in the new year?

Or do you know you need an attitude adjustment?

To have the attitude that was in Christ Jesus

Philippians 2:5 tells us.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,[a]

he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges[b];

he took the humble position of a slave[c]
and was born as a human being.

We don't know what happened to them when they left,
but we can believe that they were different.

Because the Magi returned the way of Faith Fulfilled.

When these men struck out from their homes,

they really left in an act of faith.
Guided only by a star leading them to some strange
and distant land.

Today you will have a chance to be guided by a star too. A star word...
Perhaps one that will help you to adjust your attitude...