How are you getting home tonight? Chances are you will go home the same way that you came? Either by car, train, bus, or someone picking you up. For those who walk, more than likely you will also retrace the same steps, along the same routes that you traveled in order to get here. But that was not the case, more than 2,000 years ago, for those who went to the manger to witness the miracle birth in Bethlehem. They arrived Bethlehem from the East but along different faith journey’s paths. They left Bethlehem on a totally different course, not quite exactly how they had planned it.

So, who were there at the manger more than 2,000 years ago? How did they get there? Well, the shepherds were out watching their sheep in the field, doing their job and minding their own business. The wise men, who did not know one another, came from the East and converged to the same location. They all came after the angel of the LORD appeared before them and instructed them to follow that great star. They had no idea where the star would lead them, nevertheless they followed. Talk about “blind faith”. They didn’t have GPS or Google Maps back-then to confirm their locations either. They just went and followed. Sure enough the faith of these shepherds and the wisemen were not at all blinded by this brightest star that they had ever seen. This star illuminated the sky casting a shadow in the world of darkness. The shepherds and the wisemen knew that what they were about to witness was no ordinary event.

Those shepherds and the wisemen did not coordinate with one another. They were complete strangers of diverse cultures, social, and economic backgrounds to one another…but not for long. Their lives would soon be inter-connected and their journeys of faith intersected at this crossroad in Bethlehem. **It took a divine, orchestrated act that brought all these individual lives together, including Mary and Joseph and one VERY special child, who traveled the farthest of all.**

God had brought the lives of these ordinary citizens and foreigners and converge them into this one place, because of their willingness to respond to God’s calls. **This was all part of God’s well-orchestrated plan, as Christ came to bridge the gap that separates us from God, due to our human sins.** The long-expected prophecy of the Messiah was about to be fulfilled. The waiting was almost over. Everything happened at the right place and in the right time, even though the setting may not be the most ideal.

Recently I was introduced to this children’s Christmas book entitled *“****Home By Another Way****”* by Barbara Brown Taylor, who is not only a New York Times Best-seller author, but she’s also a seminary professor and an Episcopal priest. In her book, Taylor retold the story of the three wisemen, whose lives were not only interrupted by the miracle event, but more importantly their lives were transformed by what God had challenged them to do next, after witnessing the miracle birth. It was their faith that converged them at the manger in Bethlehem. They travelled a long distance from their respective ways bearing gifts for a newborn king whom they have never met, in a story perhaps that they might have only heard. These were not Jews. They were Gentiles, foreigners and outsiders who were looking in. They came to pay homage to this king who would bring salvation of ALL of humanity.

These wisemen did not come empty handed. They came bearing gifts…not just ANY gifts, but gifts of significant value and richly symbolic in meanings. They brought Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, not quite your typical gifts for a newborn child, or for a young impoverish and unwedded couple. They really could’ve gotten gifts that were more useful and practical for them. I suppose they must have forgotten to check the baby registry that Mary and Joseph had put up on Amazon.com.

Although these elaborate gifts that the wisemen brought did not define the occasion of the child’s birth, but this was no ordinary child’s birth. Instead these gifts defined what the child would eventually become and what he would do universally for ALL.

**Gold** represented his royalty as a king who rules over us; **Frankincense** represented his high priesthood who prays for us. The **Myrrh** represented the one who gave his ultimate sacrifice with his life, that he was buried, died, and resurrected for the redemption of our sins. These gifts might seemed to be out of place at that time, nevertheless **these were the perfect gifts…FOR the perfect child.**

Furthermore, what took place at the manger was not only a miracle birth that transformed the lives of Mary and Joseph, but it also inspired the faith of the shepherds, the wisemen, as well as all of us tonight. Mary, Joseph, and the child must leave in a hurry after the child’s birth. Going home was NOT an option for them because, as we read earlier, the governor of Judea ordered a decree that all male child under the age of 2 shall be killed. The nights were not silent and they were not calm. Yet God chose to come to us in the midst of chaos, violence, and bloodshed.

Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus became migrant refugees, like many of those who are across our southern border today, wandering about what God has installed for them of their future. Their welfare and lives might be in peril but they knew that God was on their side to protect them and to provide them with peace and safety.

What about the shepherds and the wisemen? After their visit in Bethlehem, they also went about their separate ways. But now they took on a whole new mission, as the first evangelists to proclaim the good news of the newborn Messiah to the people. These shepherds were not religiously trained, perhaps they didn’t even know how to read. They were simply grass-root common folks who were getting by one day at a time. **They had nothing to offer…but themselves!** Because of their nomadic lifestyle, they were perfect for their new role as the evangelists in sharing what they had witnessed on this night to others.

The wisemen, on the other hand, obviously did not report back to Herod to inform him about their new discovery. They were defiant of Herod’s order by resisting against the higher political authority and went “**Home By Another Way**” into the uncharted new territories and new spaces. The lives of these three complete strangers would forever be bonded by what they had experienced together. All because they were willing to listen and obey. They were willing to change their course and listen to what God has to say.

We don’t know too much about these wisemen after they left Bethlehem. Some speculated that their extravagant gifts to Mary, Joseph, and the baby might have financed the way, as they escaped into Egypt. Nevertheless, because of their philanthropy, these wisemen would probably bring this message of Good News of salvation into their land, and identify children who may have special needs, families who are making ends meet, or other migrant refugees who are seeking shelters and welcome in their foreign land. Their lives were forever transformed by the arrival of this newborn king.

So, going back to my opening thought? **How are you getting home tonight?** How has YOUR life been changed and inspired by the event that took place more than 2,000 years ago and 6,000 miles away? Through this miracle birth event, **God proves once again that God’s LOVE is transcending and transformative throughout people’s lives.** God will work miracles out of the lives of those who obey and trust in Him.

In the same way, it is by no coincidence that God has brought US here in this place and at this time, as we remember and celebrate the most sacred event of the Messiah’s birth. Christ our Lord and our Savior is among us here tonight, as well as those whom He has gathered around the world in His houses of worship.

As disciples of Christ, we are being **commissioned and sent out into this world as God’s witnesses and evangelists…to not only to tell what we have seen, heard, and proclaimed here tonight, but to be the bearers of God’s Good News to all. Let us go “home by another way” wherever the star may lead us from Bethlehem to the ends of the earth.**

***"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 3:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)