

**“They Set Out”**

Polo First United Methodist Church  
Polo, IL

Isaiah 60:1-6  
Matthew 2:1-12

January 8, 2012 (1<sup>st</sup> after Epiphany)

**Prayer:** Living God, help us to hear your Word that we may truly understand; that, understanding, we may believe; and believing, we may follow your way in all faithfulness, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do. Amen.

We’ve got this story about the magi, or wise men if you want to call them that. I don’t think it really matters what you call them. Matthew, the writer of this story, doesn’t seem too concerned with giving us their names or telling us how many of them there were, so I don’t think that should really be our concern. All we know is we’ve got this story about these guys (or maybe they were girls?) who are on this journey.

Actually, by the time we meet these guys the story is just about over. They’ve already travelled a long way to find this child who was supposedly born King of the Jews. The crazy thing is that they’ve been following this star the whole way. That seems kind of weird to me. If they were following a star, did they only travel at night? I don’t know . . . It’s strange. And presumably, they didn’t have anyone tell them to do this, one day they just saw this star and figured they should start walking, so they set out.

They must have trusted that this star was going to take them somewhere. At least in the right general direction anyway. I don’t know how they knew that this star was the one that signified that a King was born. Matthew doesn’t tell us that either, so maybe it doesn’t really matter.

So, anyway, they’ve been following this star. And they’ve travelled this far, but now that they’re so close to their destination they decide to ask some of the locals for directions. I don’t know why they did this, maybe they didn’t trust the star anymore. Maybe it was daytime and they wanted to get this journey over with and they didn’t want to wait for sundown to come again so they could follow the star the rest of the way. Or maybe the star just didn’t give them the exact address of where they were headed. Either way, where we pick up the story, we find these guys pulling over to the side of the road to ask for directions.

And the first words out of their mouths, actually the only words out of their mouths in this entire story are: “Where can we find this kid who’s been born King of the Jews?”

Now I don’t know about you but it seems kind of fitting to me that the first word out of their mouth is “where.”

I think that stands out to me because I imagine before this star every started that these guys had been asking that question for a long time. I mean, they were obviously searching for something. Keeping their eyes open for a sign. Don't you think? I mean, if they were willing to drop everything to follow a star out into the unknown on a thousand-plus mile journey, what's to say they hadn't been following all kinds of other crazy signs looking for what ever it was they were looking for?

I imagine these guys, well actually at first I imagine them just as a bunch of random people. They don't know each other yet. And they're living their lives, minding their own business. They go to work, spend time with their family, read a book, and all the while they've got this nagging feeling inside of them. They're not sure what it is, or where it came from, but its there, deep inside.

At first, they just shrug it off. There's no sense doing anything about it, they don't know what to do or where to go anyway, and besides they've never felt this way before. Maybe it's just heartburn or acid reflux or something. So they just get on with their life.

They go out on the weekends and hang out with friends. They start collecting coins, or something like that, just for a hobby or something to do. Then work picks up and they're busy doing extra overtime for a while. And its around this same time that feeling comes back again. It's a little stronger than before. It's like this need deep inside. Or a hole that has to be filled. But still, they don't know what it is and they aren't about to try and figure it out now, they're too busy.

So they just get on with life. And years pass by like that. That nagging feeling resurfacing every once and a while. One guy gets married thinking that will quelch the feeling. One guy devotes his life to his job and becomes rich, all in an attempt to satisfy this need deep inside him. Another guy just starts accumulating a bunch of stuff, his house is filled with knickknacks and junk because he thinks all this stuff will fill that hole in his heart.

But nothing seems to do the trick. So they start asking the question more and more, "Where?" Where can I find what I'm looking for? Where is contentment? Where is happiness? Where is love? Where is the solution to this problem? Where can I find fulfillment? Where is my life headed?

One guy starts reading all these self-help books looking for the answer. Another guy spends all his time and money at the bar trying to drown the question. A third guy goes on long walks and stares into the sky, because where else is he going to go. They're all searching for something. They're all asking the same question. Where?

So maybe when that star appeared they had been following all these other paths, searching in all these others places, that they figured they might as well see where this star would lead them. So they set out.

I don't know, this is all just hypothetical of course . . . but it sounds oddly familiar, doesn't it? I mean aren't we like that a little bit too?

We have that same tugging in our hearts. That same feeling that this might not be all there is to life. And we look all kinds of other places to fill this need inside of us. So we compare ourselves to other people, because we want to know if we have things more figured out than they do. We want to know if we're further along in finding the answer than they are. If we're happier, more successful . . .

We ask the questions, "Where do you live?" Internally judging the person if she says somewhere on the wrong side of the tracks. "Where do you work?" Oh, you poor thing, we think to ourselves, that doesn't pay very much does it? "Where did you get your clothes?" Not that we really care, we wouldn't be caught dead wearing those rags. "Where did you go to school?" "Where are you from?" "Where do you hang out on the weekends?" The questions go on and on. And we're comparing ourselves to them, trying to determine if we're better off than they are.

But then, when we're all alone, no matter how justified we've made ourselves feel during the day, inevitably those burning questions bubble back to the surface in a moment of vulnerability. We can't ignore them any more, we can't feign deafness any longer. Where am I going in life?, we think to ourselves. Where is the joy? Where is the peace? Where is the relief? Where am I ever going to go to figure these things out?

So you set out in search of the fix. Maybe you'll find it in a relationship. Maybe in a new job. Maybe if you just fill up your schedule with another thing to do, you won't have time to hear the voice in the back of your head asking all those silly questions. Maybe you take medication to deaden the feeling. Maybe you go searching . . . In books, in possessions, under a rock, in the sky . . .

I don't know . . . Maybe this is just me. Maybe you don't ask these questions at all. Maybe you're not searching for anything. But I think those guys in our story definitely were. So they set out, following a star of all things.

And after they had searched in so many places and traveled God-only-knows how many miles they asked the question one more time, "Where? Where is the newborn child?" We're here to see him. Maybe he's what we've been searching for. Maybe he's the one who can fill this hole inside. Can you tell us where he is? Where we can find him?

Now, I wish I could tell you what happened to these guys after they finally saw that baby. Was he what they were looking for? Did seeing him fill that emptiness inside? Did they suddenly have a purpose for their life? I don't know.

I'd like to hope that they had found what they were looking for, but I don't know.

The only clue that we have is that after seeing the baby Jesus they went home by another way. Now I'm not sure exactly what that means. Maybe they went a different way home so that they could search in other places. Because they hadn't yet found what they were looking for.

Or maybe they went home by another way because the path they had been following before was no longer good enough. Their encounter with the baby changed their life journey, and that's what it means when our story says they went home by another way. I don't know.

What do you think?

Amen.