

# The Road Isn't Straight

## Epiphany Sunday

Matthew 2:1-12  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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First things first. The overall purpose of the story of the magi is to reveal that God is made manifest to *all* of humanity in and through the person of Jesus, the Christ. That is why this story is called an epiphany story and this is Epiphany Sunday.

The Greek word for **epiphany** literally means “manifestation” – an appearance or a revelation of something previously unknown or hidden. In the broadest sense of the term, an epiphany is an occasion when something either appears or is revealed to you. It is often described as **an illuminating discovery, a new insight or revelation, especially one that comes unexpectedly, when everything becomes clearer and into focus**. We often call these “Aha” moments. And in a religious setting, an epiphany is often used to describe the revelation of, or an experience of the Divine in our midst.

The church **season of Epiphany** (which officially starts on January 6, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, and lasts until Ash Wednesday at the beginning of Lent) also recognizes the symbolic “light” that Jesus brought into the world. This is a season to recognize and celebrate that light.

Now comes the practical and spiritual part of this story and this sermon. As I ask almost every year at this time, **have you had any epiphany moments lately? Have there been any times or places when you have felt that God's Presence has been revealed or made manifest to you?** Of important note, however, people perceive and experience the Sacred Presence of God in their own lives in many different ways, and often in different ways from other people. **Spiritual experiences aren't uniform, and certainly not meant as a competition.**

Let's look, now, at the challenge present in this biblical story. In other words, **how can we see ourselves as part of this story?** Of the many, many things we can glean from this story, there's just one I want us to focus on today. It's what happens at the very end when the magi, after receiving the gift of the dream to avoid Herod, discern they need to make a change from their expected route home and return by another way – a different path, perhaps the road less traveled.

**We learn that journeys in life, the roads we take, are not always straight.** The resource material from A Sanctified Art that we've used throughout the season of Advent concludes with this Sunday and ties the theme together with the scripture this way. **“Too often, we've been told that a successful life is a linear one. But in reality, our lives unfold with many unexpected twists and turns.** The Magi follow a star, embarking on a long journey in a foreign land in order to honor the newborn Christ. Instead of returning to Herod as commanded, they trust their dreams and go home by another way. Their road isn't straight, but God “makes a way in the wilderness” (Isaiah 43:19) as they follow their intuition and diverge from the expected path.”

**Have you ever done that in your life – followed your intuition, your gut feeling, and diverged from a path you expected to follow?** I have. Like perhaps most of you, life

has unfolded with unexpected turns. As most of you are aware, my undergraduate degree is in geology. I had a career as a petroleum geologist and petrophysical engineer. That is the path of life I had expected to travel throughout my working years. And yet, I find myself here, standing behind a pulpit as an ordained Presbyterian pastor. My path certainly hasn't been a straight one. And I mean that in more ways than one. Yet, the message for today is that knowing the road isn't straight can be liberating and empowering. I wish I had known that at the time.

**Life's road was never meant to be a straight line from one point to the next. And the best news to reveal throughout all of this is that God is with us in every twist and turn.**

Through experience, we know that life is complicated and nuanced. Therefore, we need to validate that **there are many faithful paths**. The path that the Magi took teaches us that a faithful path can be one that resists deceptive and oppressive powers, one that follows God's light wherever it shines. **Kayla Craig**, our resource biblical commentator writes:

As we embrace another new year, we often look at what was so that we can more surely enter into what *will* be. Our paths are rarely linear, woven with threads that twist and turn unexpectedly.

The timeless tale of the Magi from Matthew 2:1-12 paints a vivid picture of this truth. These wise travelers from the East didn't follow a straightforward path to find Jesus. Guided by dreams and stars, their journey was filled with royal encounters and unforeseen detours. Their experience teaches us a comforting lesson about our winding paths: **feeling uncertain or lost is okay. We don't need to have everything figured out.**

**Sometimes, the most profound moments in life come from taking a courageous turn that leads us away from our meticulously-planned routes.**

King Herod, steeped in ulterior motives, directed the Magi to report back where the Christ child was. But after being divinely warned in a dream, the Magi chose not to return to Herod, opting to leave "by another road."

Their decision to embrace alternative paths challenges us as we think about our own journeys. The Magi were willing to have their assumptions challenged and plans changed. The same is true for us: We don't have to have all the answers or an obstacle-free path because hope is what empowers our journey.

**Often, the straight and narrow ways we assume are set before us are not our only options.**

As we go forth in faith, we'll have opportunities to decide between conforming to external expectations and following God's path. Following the Spirit's stirrings may lead us down twists and turns that lead us out of our comfort zones but fit us into a divine path of truth, justice, and peace.

**We don't have to know where we're going to know that God is with us.**

Isaiah 43:16-21 testifies to this truth with a powerful promise: God makes a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. This prophetic assurance paints a vivid picture of God's active Presence in our lives: creating paths where none seem to exist and inviting us to **embrace the new things God is doing**. It's a divine invitation to move forward, learn from the past, and step into new possibilities. We are never alone in our journey.

Like the Magi, we are often called to take unexpected paths and find new ways. Every journey carries risks and revelations, but God actively carves paths in the wilderness, guiding us through uncharted territories with the promise of making all things new. This perspective empowers us to face the uncertainties of our journey with courage, knowing God is with us in the detours.

In this new year... let this assurance fill you with peace and courage, open to the new and unexpected paths that God may reveal in the days to come."

**It will be interesting to see what new and unexpected paths present themselves before us as a community of faith in this coming year.** I will close with this blessing:

*It's okay if your journey hasn't looked like you thought it would. As you navigate twists and turns, stay curious and open to where God might be leading. May you find the courage to explore new routes and the wisdom to follow the One who will never leave or forsake you. May each new path be a chance to trust God and discover deeper truths about the love that will never let you go.*

Amen.

Resource:  
A Sanctified Art, Advent 2024