

New Year's Day, 2017¹
Matt. 2:1-12

It's a day to look back reflectively and a day to look forward expectantly. One of the places we ground our reflection and our hopes is in scripture. For today, that passage is the story of the visit of the Magi.

And so I asked how does this particular story informs my own reflection and hopes.

For me the most obvious place to start is to name that the Magi were on a journey, in their case an epic journey.

Our lives as individuals and as a community can be described as a journey. Now I know that this term was used to describe my relationship with congregation following my new self-understanding as same-sex oriented, and that the word journey was not initially well received by some or understood as the best way to understand our relationship after my major life transition.

As well - journey as metaphor can be overused - a cliché if you will, but there are few words or metaphors that capture better the way our lives actually unfold. Like journeys, they have a start and end, chosen methods of travel and a destination, but certain parts of them are completely unpredictable and all of them require adaptability, resiliency, and persistence at times.

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If I was to narrow it down a bit for this morning's purposes however I would say that primarily a really good journey requires a couple of key things, first guides or guideposts along the way and second, a destination.

Looking at the story of the Magi – they had both – guides for the journey and a hoped for destination.

Their guides for the journey were:

first the stars

– one in particular, we might presume they were astrologers and could read the stars in general.

second they had consultants

– King Herod and his advisors for example when they got to Jerusalem, but presumably there were others along the way of what might have been two years of travel.

a third guide might have been ancient scriptural and prophetic texts – these texts pointed Herod's advisors to Bethlehem.

Ancient texts might also have provided the wise men with the wisdom needed to interpret the message in the stars.

And a fourth source of guidance for the wise men were dreams. They believed in and acted on the wisdom of a dream when they “returned home another way.”

So as I reflect upon the past year, I want to remember who and what my guides and guideposts were and continue to rely on them as I anticipate

the new year. I would encourage you to remember and/or seek out your own guideposts along the way and rely on them.

The story of the Magi however gives us more than practical suggestions for a successful journey it also reveals something that fundamentally holds this journey, shapes it and gives it legitimacy.

Their destination shapes everything. The object of their search is their knowledge of the birth of a new leader whom they found in a child and its mother. They discovered that this new leader was the embodiment of Love: God with us. It was a love that attracts, radiates, shapes and reshapes the world, their world, the whole world. The love of God, the God who is love, the God who loves us because we belong to God, the God whose love holds us, attracted the wise men in the first place, filled the imagination of their journey, drove them to their knees in adoration, led them to give extravagant gifts, filled them with joy, and led them on a new path on the way home – a journey of new life and love and understanding of their relationship to this Love.

The opposite of a Love shaped journey is a fear shaped life. Herod and his advisors were living a fear shaped life. That life led to death – horrible violent deaths for others - the toddlers in Bethlehem, and eventually themselves.

Fears arise on all journeys. That's just a fact of life. I imagine that was the case on the long journey for the wise men, some nights the stars would have been obscured by clouds, storms, missteps, lack of clarity about next steps. All of these are common obstacles to journeys.

There have certainly been fears and obstacles in my own journey and this will continue to be the case.

But the perfect love of a God who holds our lives and the lives of those we love and are called to love has the power to transform those fears into life.

This God of love is the only destination that matters. This is the destination that holds everything, makes the journey worth it, and gives us life for now and the future.