

WESTMINSTER
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SERMON

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But Go Anyway

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I have driven between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia more times than I can actively recall since my sophomore year of college. It's not my favorite drive, but one I have become accustomed to. It's gotten to the point where I have memorized certain landmarks along the Pennsylvania Turnpike that, along with the GPS, indicate to me how far I have come and how much further I have to go. But the most interesting thing to me about this drive is the distance I travel. The point-to-point distance between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh is about 250 miles. But when I take the trip, the distance I travel is somewhere around 300 miles. And of course, as is the case with most drives, this is because it is very rare for a trip to require one to simply drive in a straight line to their destination. At some point, you will encounter some turns that you must navigate and possibly some obstacles that you have to maneuver around. In other words, even if you can visualize your destination straight in front of you, more often than not the path to reach it is not straight.

That is exactly the situation that we find in our text for today. Our text is the story of the Epiphany—a story we only find in the Gospel of Matthew. In Chapter 1, Matthew opens the Gospel with his genealogical account and the story of the birth of Jesus. Because of the way the story is told, It may be

tempting to believe that events of chapter 2 happened immediately after the birth of Jesus, but that is not necessarily the case. It would be more accurate to simply say that sometime after His birth, Matthew says, magi from the east come to Jerusalem saying, “Where is the child who has been born the King of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.” And after a circuitous journey that had brought them into an uncomfortable audience with Herod the Great as they tried to follow the star to the Messiah, they finally make it to Bethlehem where the infant Jesus was. And they did just what they set out to do.

If there is one thing I have learned in my walk with God, it is that the path that God has for us is usually never straight. It is often full of twists and bends that we often don’t expect and rarely plan for, but nevertheless must learn how to steer through. That certainly was the case for the magi. What probably seemed like a simple sign for them turned into a winding journey through the Holy Land. But beloved, I submit to you that if those magi were here today, they would say to us, “No, the path isn’t straight. But go anyway.”

My dear siblings in Christ, God has a path for all of us. And while God did not promise that the path would be straight or

simple, all God requires of us is our willingness to go that path anyway. But if we're going to go that path, there are just three things that we have to understand about it.

1. The path is a divine creation.

- a. In Matthew, the Epiphany is the first formal recognition of the Messianic identity of Jesus. And it is interesting to me that God directs the magi, not with an instruction from an angel or a message in a dream as God had done before in ages, but rather with a star. There isn't a clear consensus on what exactly the magi saw, but whether they were seeing a comet, a supernova, or a conjunction of planets, it is clear to them that God was using this astrological event to direct them to where the King they had been waiting for had finally been born. (Matt 2:1-2)
- b. This is interesting to me because it seems that recently, there have been so many efforts to criticize and disparage practices that do not neatly fit within our contemporary Christian orthodoxy and praxis. I cannot tell you how many Facebook posts, tweets, and TikToks I have seen of Christians calling astrology demonic and

contrary to the teachings of the Bible. But here it is, the only ones in our text who are even aware of the birth of—and subsequently the only ones in our text who can locate—the Messiah are astrologers.

- c. My point is this: while the decision to follow is ours to make, the form that path takes is decided by God, and God alone. We cannot dictate how God communicates the path, how God configures the path, or how God conceives the path. God will make the path how God sees fit to make the path. It is not our job to argue or negotiate with God about what the path looks like or how long the path is; our job is just to follow it. And I don't know about you, but this is what gives me strength in my walk with God: God can not only see the big picture but can also see me in the big picture. So I can rest in the assurance that no matter what arises in my path, there is nothing that will take God by surprise. There is nothing that God cannot handle. There is no valley so wide that God cannot help me cross, no mountain so high that God cannot help me climb, and no giant so strong that God cannot help me fight.

- d. The hymnwriter put it this way, “Trials dark on every hand and we cannot understand all the ways that God would lead us to that blessed Promised Land. But he guides with His eye, and we’ll follow ‘til we die, for we’ll understand it better by and by.” You might not have it all figured out, but you have to trust that God will not lead you to a place where God cannot sustain you. The path is a divine creation!

2. The path is a personal revelation.

- a. The text goes on to say that Herod heard about what the magi were saying and asked the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born. They deduced that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. So he concocts a scheme to root out this infant King that threatens his authority and calls for the magi to give them marching orders. (Matt 2:3-8)
- b. I have come to understand that when you commit yourself to following the path that God has for you, there will always be people who try to speculate. There will always be people who come up with their own interpretations of what God is doing in your life. There

will always be people who try to superimpose their will over God's will for your life. That is exactly what Herod is doing; that's why he lies to the magi in verse 8.

- c. Child of God, there will always be people who do not quite understand the path that God is leading you through. But quite frankly, it is not everybody's business where God is taking you. Everybody does not need to know what God is revealing to you. Everybody does not need to know the plans that God is unfolding before you. The nature of your path is primarily between you and God. Some people may theorize about you. Let them. Some people may assume they know. Let them. Some people may misconstrue your actions. Let them.
- d. The truth of the matter is that there is no force on this earth that can stop you from getting to that which God has for you. So you don't have to worry about people who mean you no good. You don't have to concern yourself with people who are obsessed with derailing God's plan for your life. You don't have to be anxious about people who think that they have the final say. No matter who is determined to deter you from the path that God has for you, you cannot allow yourself to lose focus.

- e. Beloved, I must confess that I still have things that are unclear in my path. I still have questions I need God to answer. I still have decisions that I need God to help me make. And I refuse to let anybody get in my way and keep me from the blessings that God has for me because I believe that what God has for me is for me. And what God has for you is for you. And even if people try to get in your way, when it is all said and done, your testimony will be just like Joseph's: what they meant for evil, God meant for good!

3. The path ends in humble adoration.

- a. The text says that the star continued to lead the magi to the place where Jesus was. And when they enter the house, they fall down, worship Him, and present Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:9-11)
- b. Notice, beloved, the magi do not complain about the path they had to take to get there. They do not offer critiques on how they would have formed the path. They do not make commentary about how difficult the path was to follow. No,

when they get to where God was leading them, their first instinct is to worship. And that ought to be our posture when we find ourselves at the end of the path that God has for us. When we get to the end of our journeys, we ought to tell God, “Thank you,” for:

- i. allowing God’s grace and mercy to follow us wherever we went.
 - ii. never leaving us or forsaking us.
 - iii. protecting us from dangers seen and unseen.
 - iv. doing what we thought was impossible.
 - v. giving us strength for today and hope for tomorrow.
- c. That’s why Paul told the Romans, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18) And when that glory is revealed, when God’s plan has been fully revealed to you, when you’ve reached the conclusion of the path that God made for you—whether it is the path that God has for you while you still walk this earth or the path that ends when you take your eternal rest—your first

instinct ought to be to tell God, “Thank you,” for loving you and choosing you in spite of you, for walking and talking with you every step of the way, and for doing for you what you never could have done for yourself.

I’m going to my seat, but I just stopped by to let somebody know that the path God has made for you is not going to be straight, but go anyway. You might not be able to see your way forward sometimes, but go anyway. There may be some dangerous twists and turns, but go anyway. You might encounter some obstacles in your way, but go anyway. Nobody said that being a Christian was supposed to be easy. Nobody said that following Jesus is a simple task. But the beauty of following Jesus is the reassurance that you never go anywhere by yourself. That’s why the Bible says:

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Ps 23:6)

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart!” (Ps 27:14)

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their

strength, mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint!" (Is 40:30-31)

The hymnwriter said, "It may be in the valley, where countless dangers hide. It may be in the sunshine that I, in peace abide. But this one thing I know, if it be dark or fair, if Jesus is with me, I'll go anywhere! If Jesus goes with me, I'll go anywhere! 'Tis heaven to me where'er I may be if He is there! I count it a privilege, His cross to bear. If Jesus goes with me, I'll go anywhere!"

So go! Go understanding that God is not demanding perfection, just asking your willingness to trust Him. Go trusting that each step you take is ordered by God. Go believing that in God's own time, in God's own way, according to God's own will, God will do what God promised God would do.

The path is not straight. But go anyway! Because as you go, God will go with you. And God is with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.



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