

**“God’s Travel Itinerary”**  
**Matthew 2:1-16**  
*Series: Home for Christmas*  
Scott Burgess

Woodside Church

December 27, 2020

In 2007, I listened to Woodside missionaries talk about their recent trip to the Dominican Republic during a Sunday service. While they spoke, I felt a calling like I had never felt before. I truly felt that God was opening my eyes showing me something he wanted me to do. On an impulse, I told Judy Jones I would be joining them next year.

Fast forward to 2008 and the mission trip planning meetings, I quickly realized a compelling call from God could also have a cost associated with it. My daughter’s birthday would be smack-dab in the middle of our trip. I had never missed one of her birthdays. I sat down with Lizz, and Michelle, to explain what I was feeling and how important it was. How I honestly felt that God was calling me to do this. Fortunately, she would be turning 15 not 5, and I think she understood – but that didn’t mean she accepted it. I knew I had to come up with something special.

On Sunday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, Michelle and Lizz were both at the Higher Ground Service. Lizz was singing in the band and after they played the opening songs, she sat down with her friends to watch the announcements. What surprised her was when a video started, and she saw me on the screen. I explained what it was we were doing in the DR. I then took the opportunity to wish her a Happy Birthday, apologized for not being there with her and thanked her for understanding how important it was that I follow the plan God set up for me. I understand that there was more than one teary eye at Higher Ground that night.

Today is the last of our advent series titled “Home for Christmas.” We have discussed Looking for Home; Longing for Home; Living at Home; Lighting up our Home and on Christmas Eve, Doug spoke of The Lord’s Home. Today we are going to consider Leaving Home.

As I discovered in 2008, sometimes God places a calling on us to serve Him in a way that we don’t anticipate. And it often does require us to leave home. Perhaps it is a simple thing: coming to service an hour or so earlier to help on the greeting team. Maybe taking a night in the week to help with some ministry. Going to Trenton or Philadelphia to serve food to those in need. And sometimes, it is leaving home for a week or more to serve in another country. In each case we do leave home, and there is often a cost associated with it.

These ten months of Covid-19 have certainly turned our lives upside down. Lockdown, limited contact with people. Leaving home has not only become more difficult, but it is actually discouraged. And with the restrictions, what have we learned about our faith throughout this virus period?

- We Can Still Worship
  - I’ve realized I can worship God outside.
  - We can hold services while socially distancing ourselves in the building.

- And thanks to all the technology available, we can attend church in the comfort of our homes as most of us are doing right now.
- Growth Groups & Fellowship Go On
  - Let me ask you a question: Prior to Covid, who honestly had no idea what a “Zoom Meeting” was? If you’re like me, I’m guessing that is a lot of you. Zoom and other virtual platforms have allowed growth groups to continue throughout. And while I admit I miss my Friday morning bagel sandwiches, last Friday after the snowstorm, it was nice to get out of bed, walk downstairs, turn on my computer, pour a cup of coffee and join in with my growth group.
- Ministry Is Still Available
  - It hasn’t been easy, but people are still serving. Woodside made meals for essential workers. Volunteers helped with TASK – Trenton Area Soup Kitchens. We collected coats and toys and all of the Angel Tree tags were picked for children’s Christmas gifts. Conquering Life Prison and Recovery Ministries was not only able to maintain weekly recovery meetings, but because they were being livestreamed, we often 3 or 4 times the number of attendees that we usually have.
- And four – It’s Not the Same
  - All of this has been helpful to battle the virus and try to keep each other safe.
  - It’s a blessing that we’ve been able to study, learn, serve, and worship.
  - But God didn’t create us to be distant or separated. He desires a relationship with you, but he wants us to have relationships with each other as well. We were created for community. And being created for community requires that we make ourselves available for where God sends us.

## **The Magi Visit the Messiah**

**2** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup> “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him

with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. - Matthew 2:1-12.

<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. - Matthew 2:16

It is difficult for us to determine exactly how far they travelled, or where they came from, as the scripture only indicates they came from the east. Consequently, it is difficult to know how long they travelled, but there are a couple of clues that help us. In the book of Luke it is said, “<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” - Luke 2:11-12.

Matthew writes, <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. - Matthew 2:11. Notice the shepherds greeted a baby while the Magi saw a child.

Verse 16 gives us another clue – “When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.” - Matthew 2:16

For today’s message the exact distance and time are not terribly important, but we can assume that it was between one and two years. What is important is they took God’s instructions and guidance, left home, and went to greet the child Jesus. And remember, these are not even Jews. They are probably the first Gentiles to meet Jesus. And while our tradition of giving Christmas gifts is sometimes linked with the gifts given by the wise men, notice that they worshipped the child before giving the gifts.

Yet God wasn’t done with the Magi’s itinerary. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. - Matthew 2:12.

God didn’t want to risk allowing Herod to find out exactly where the child was. But God’s travel plans are not complete as the magi head home.

## **The Escape to Egypt**

<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”<sup>[c]</sup> - Matthew 2:13-15

It is a continuation of the faith both Mary and Joseph had for God. Mary is told she will have the Lord’s baby. Joseph is told to trust God and accept Mary as his wife. They are both told to go to Bethlehem. Sure, you can say it was because of the census requirements. But since the

birth of Jesus had been prophesied to occur in Bethlehem, don't you think God would have made sure that would happen. And then God tells Joseph to leave for Egypt. He immediately got up and they began their 430-mile trip to safety.

Throughout the Bible we see plenty of instances where people are called from God to leave home. David flees to hide from Saul. Ruth leaves Moab to travel with Naomi. The disciples leave everything to follow Jesus. So, what about us? What does he call us to do?

- He wants us to serve others.
  - <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, - Matthew 28:19
    - Start now to figure out how you are going to do this. Where is God sending you? We don't wake up on a Saturday morning and decide we are going to the airport to spend a week at Disney World. We plan it out. Sometimes God lays something on our hearts, and we act on it. But sometimes we need to work out what it is we should do. Pray to God. Talk to family & friends. Share with your spiritual mentor. Call Susan Harris-Miller, our Director of Mission. Perhaps a conversation with her will help guide you to the ministry or mission that is what you want or need.
- Fellowship
  - Meet with people. Fellowship with them. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. - 1 Peter 4:8-9
    - We can't say it enough – Find a growth group. We have plenty of groups right now. You can go on the Woodside web site and search for one, or you can just check the box on the online connection card for a Peace Pod and Meg Smith with reach out to you to help find one that fits your wants and needs. Or she will help you create a new one. And then go, regularly. Our Friday Morning Men's Group, sorry – “THE Friday Morning Men's Group” meets almost every single Friday. If we have two people available, we meet. Reading and studying the bible is important. Along with prayer, it's one of the most important ways to work on your relationship with God. But studying with others adds so much more. Your thoughts and understanding are great. But can you imagine how much more you can learn by listening to other people's points of view? And on top of that it adds an accountability.
- Worship
  - Please. When this is all done. When Covid is behind us. Come back to worship. It's easy to talk yourself into the idea that you've been able to worship and listen to Doug's sermons from the comforts of your couch. But that's not his plan. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. - Hebrews 10:24-25

Worship with your brothers and sisters. Invite your family, friends, co-workers...strangers. Spread the Joy you find in worship with others. Next week we are starting a new sermon series, called "The Missing Peace". Is this time of disease, distance and divisiveness puzzling for you? Jesus has a solution you can't find anywhere else. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Start 2021 with us at Woodside and find the peace you're missing. It is true there can be a cost associated with a calling from God can be combined with a cost. But that cost is often accompanied with a reward. I originally went in 2008 because I was impressed with the explanation of what the Woodside team did on their trip. But my subsequent trips in 2010, 2012 and 2013 weren't for the sole purpose of the construction work done. What I had learned was to appreciate the building of the relationships – with Dominicans, my fellow travelers and, most importantly, with God. God doesn't ask us to leave home because he needs our help to build things. He calls us because he loves us and wants to bless us. Will you listen?