

**The Road to Bethlehem**  
**“The New Road”**  
**Matthew 2:1-12**

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Robert Frost is one of my favorite poets. Among his finest words are these:  
“I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged into a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”

Here we are at the threshold of a brand new year. It's not hard to find a seat on the Sunday after Christmas. The crowds have gone home, but like wise men from the East we have come to worship Christ the new-born King. For us, Christmas did not come to pass. It came to stay. There is a text from this ancient visit of Royalty that I want us to ponder today. (*Verse 12*) “*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*” What would it mean for you and me to take a new road home in 2007?

**CONSIDER THE ROAD OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT.**

*“And having been warned in a dream.”*

Dreams are windows to the soul. What if they were also revelations of the future? If you are reading through the Bible with us, you have discovered: Jacob dreamed about a stairway to heaven and upon awaking exclaimed, “*Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.*” Joseph dreamed that his brothers would bow down and worship him. For that he was hated. Pharaoh had a dream which Joseph interpreted that saved the whole country from starvation. Solomon had a dream that the Lord would give him a discerning heart. On the day of Pentecost, Peter, taking his text from the prophet Joel said, “*The Spirit will be poured out on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*”

What hopes and dreams dance in your head? What fantasies of a divine kind float through your mind? Maybe hoping for things that never were is more helpful for the future than lamenting things that have never been. Of course our hopes and dreams must be interpreted, tried, tested on the anvils of Scripture, tradition, and reason. Some dreams are revelations from God. Others are the result of eating a spicy

dinner, or taking strong pain medicine.

Through the years I have come to these conclusions about the will of God. There is a will of God. Life has a purpose. The will of God can be known. The desire to please God pleases God. Everything does not happen for a reason. Some things just happen. God is at work for good in all things.

### **CONSIDER THE ROAD OF MORAL INTEGRITY.**

*“And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod.”*

Sandy and I went to see the Nativity Story the other night, now playing in local movie theaters. It was actually a well done movie about the birth of Christ. I was disturbed, however, that the movie opened with Herod’s slaughter of the innocents. Somehow, I was just not ready for that. Couldn’t we just have the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay?

Then I thought, that’s not the way it was. Herod would have made Saddam Hussein look like a saint. He murdered his wife, his mother-in-law, and three of his sons. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, said it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son. On his deathbed, Herod ordered some of the most distinguished people in Jerusalem to be arrested and killed at the moment of his death, so some tears would be shed at his passing. The Wise Men had to decide, would they be part of the problem, or part of the solution? So do we.

At the gate of a new year we could pray: “Good Lord, deliver us from pack thinking.” Let us refuse to do it just because everybody else is doing it. Most of us are content to just go along with the crowd. Morality will never be determined by public opinion. The Bible says, *“Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may be able to know the will of God (Romans 12:2).*

Here at the gate of a new year, we must decide. Will we just talk the talk, or walk the walk? Integrity is kind of like the weather, everybody talks about it, not many people do anything about it. Integrity is: Long-term good taking charge of short-term desire, being sexually pure in the heat of passion, business ethics under the pressure of making a living, believing goodness to be worth it when it appears otherwise.

John Huss was a Roman Catholic priest back in the early 1400’s. He criticized the Church for restricting the sacrament and selling indulgences. He was brought to Rome and tried for heresy. On July 6, 1415, he was burned at the stake. This quote from John Huss now hangs on a wall in the Museum of Literature in the Czech Republic. “Woe unto me if I remain silent. For it would be better for me to die than not to take a stand against great wickedness, as this would make me an accomplice to sin and hell.”

### **CONSIDER THE ROAD OF DYNAMIC FAITH.**

*“And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.”*

They returned to their country on the road less traveled, without the benefit of a roadmap or, for that matter, even a road. There was no GPS on the noses of their camels. Such is the nature of faith.

*“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* By faith, Noah built a boat in the desert that saved his family from the flood. By faith, Abraham when he was called...obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith, Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. *“The righteous live by faith”* (Romans 1:17).

Personally, I would rather live by sight. I like to know what’s going on. I prefer to project what is going to happen. I’m a proponent of goal setting and strategic planning. If we don’t plan our destination how will we know if we have arrived?

Unfortunately, life is not so predictable. For better or worse, two plus two does not always equal four in the math of life. We do not always reap what we sow. Illness, like the weather, is no respecter of persons. It rains on the just and the unjust.

I said to the one who stood at the gate of a new year, “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” He replied, “Go out into the darkness and put your hand in the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than any known way.”

So on I go not knowing, I would not if I might.  
I would rather walk in the dark with God  
Than walk alone in the light.  
I would rather walk with God by faith,  
Than walk alone by sight.

*“And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.”* So, here on the threshold of a brand new year, let us determine by God’s grace to take the road less traveled, it could make all the difference.