

The Way x01.

READ: Matthew 2: 1 – 12. They went back by a different way...v12

Encourage creativity – poetry, song, prophecy, meditation and contemplation this year on The Way.

We aim to see through our study and reflection on Scripture this year a clear thread of teaching and revelation about God showing a way forward and a way through that we can follow.

There are prophecies in the OT about this and we heard a little of this in our Watch Night gather when Geoff spoke from *Isaiah 43: 19 – 21* on *I'm making a way through the dessert.*

In the NT we read of John the Baptist calling out to people to *prepare a way for the Messiah to enter in* and Jesus' own claim in response to questions that he is the Way to the Father God.

In the early Church we read of **men and women who “belonged to *the Way*” (Acts 9:2; 22:4)** *The Way* became a title describing followers of Jesus - the name of their belief before the term Christian was used.

In *Scripture*, there is abundant advice for what path in life will provide the most meaning and fulfillment. Our path refers to *the way* we live and what we decide to do with our limited time on earth.

We enter the New Year with the knowledge that even though we step into the darkness of the unknown (term I used last Sunday) we have the Light of God with us to guide us in the way that we should go: Psalm 119: 105 *Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.*

Fascinating visit of the Magi to the house in which Jesus the child was growing

What we do know? We know something of this group of men because of Daniel's relationship with them when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. He became their administrator and they too became familiar with his prophecies and other prophecies regarding the Jewish Messiah. The Greek word for these men was MAGOI and in their day they were the astronomers, wise men, alchemists, sometimes translated magician but not necessarily occultists. These were the wise men of “other nations” that were drawn (by God) to find the King of the Jews – the Jewish Messiah. They were drawn by the prophecies that they had some knowledge of, the amazing light phenomena – astra that they saw in the sky and maybe also by dreams (which are mentioned here).

The **Magi were** the sacred caste of the Medes from ancient Media (inhabitants of Persia), who **were** responsible for the religious and funerary practices, and who eventually adopted **Zoroastrianism** only at the end of the 4th century BCE and proclaimed Zoroaster to be their teacher. Thus, some distinguish between the **Zoroastrian** priests

and the Magi during early Achaemenid (first Persian Empire) times. Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest religions that remains active. It is a monotheistic faith, centered in a dualistic cosmology of good and evil and an eschatology predicting the ultimate destruction of evil. [Wikipedia](#) The ancient pre-Islamic religion of Iran that survives there in isolated areas and, more prosperously, in India, where the descendants of **Zoroastrian** Iranian (Persian) immigrants are known as Parsees.

Matthew does not mention the exact number of these Magi from the East.

According to some traditions, however, there were three wise men. It is likely that this number was simply chosen to correspond with the number of gifts presented to the baby Jesus – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Nevertheless, other numbers are provided by other traditions. In the Orient, for instance, tradition dictates that there were 12 Magi. Additionally, early Christian art provides different numbers of Magi. In a painting from the cemetery of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus, two Magi are shown. A painting in the Lateran Museum, however, shows three, whilst another in the cemetery of Domitilla shows four. On a vase in the Kircher Museum, eight Magi are shown.

We have no idea of their names and different traditions make up different names. Their origin or “own country” – probably Persia or modern-day Iran. Would have taken a month or so at least to travel to Bethlehem and the text (v16) states that astra appeared about 2 years before they met Herod.

We thought before Christmas of the “heavens declaring the glory of God” and this included **heavenly beings and heavenly bodies and sometimes angels and stars** are described interchangeably. The stories of Jesus’ birth highlight both angels and an astra of some sort. Whether the “light phenomenon” was a physical star, an angel or a manifestation like the Shekinah glory is unclear – but it was an appearance that was perceived to mark the birth/ rising of a great person – in this case the Messiah of the Jews. (*Numbers 24:7 speaks of a rising star- a king like David to defeat the Medes, but the prophecy also was used to relate to the coming of the Messiah. Balaam’s (strange person) prophecy.*

Matthew 2: 12.

Lectio Divina: praying with your Bible in the Spirit...

God protected these men and the message they took back to their own country... they went back a different way (ALLES HODOU) because God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod in Jerusalem. (We know that Herod who was given the title “King of the Jews” by the Romans had every intention of extinguishing the child that the Magi had come to worship. The Chief Priests had advised that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem - according to the Prophet Micah and taking into account Genesis 49:10 and 2 Samuel 5:2. Joseph was similarly warned to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt.

V12 What do I take from this?

We should listen out for guidance from God. This guidance was clear and didn't seem to need interpretation.

Both the Magi and Joseph were diverted, pushed into a different way – in both cases it was an emergency and a protection issue. We are simply told that the Magi dreamt a warning and Joseph saw an angel of the Lord who in a dream appeared and warned him. Joseph had already had an experience like this before and I suspect the Magi were also troubled by dreams.

Both the Magi and Joseph came from cultural traditions that expected revelation through dreams.

They couldn't turn to their Bibles (scriptures in synagogues) as we might advocate but **we ask does God still call people to change direction or give them warnings using dreams?**

I would say – yes.

But all dreams are not God speaking – they are more likely our sub-conscious working through an anxiety or unresolved issue. They may even be that we've eaten too much rich food and it's still being digested.

So, what should we do if we have a vivid dream or even a dream that keeps re-curing?

- Write it down or draw it.
- Reflect on it and if we are a Follower of the Way ask the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret it. *John 16: 13 The Spirit reveals the truth about God (says Jesus). He will lead you into all truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come (VV14 and 15 speak of the relationship of the Trinity of Godhead).*
- I strongly recommend that you share the dream with a mature Christian who you know has gifts and skills of discernment. Also, it needs to be a person who can keep confidences but is accountable to others and a Higher Authority.

There are times when God is warning us to change the way we are headed or even the way we are living and the choices we are making – or a person to avoid who means us harm. We are wise if we listen to what is said by dream or by another person who we trust and respect. We live well by listening to what God says but be careful because there are some people who like giving out their opinion and inferring it comes from God.

Our Protector is God – JEHOVAH SABAOTH – and I am positioned under God's wing.