

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Title: "Another Road"

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Choose Your Own Adventure, a children's book series which was extremely popular in the 80's and into the 90's, was a collection of stories in which the reader got to play a major role in how the stories would end. So as the reader was working through the book, they would encounter options from which to choose propelling them further into the story, and each choice would then lead to more options down the road and ultimately to an ending – to one ending of many. I was doing a little research on these books and discovered that some of them had up to 44 possible endings, or as few as 8. There was no particular ratio of good or bad endings, happy endings or sad ones, and sometimes choices that you made within the story would lead to the same ending. This really gave a feeling of randomness and unpredictability as your choices as the reader truly mattered in how the story would end for the main character.

Now such concepts are still around today and there are video games and even a new Netflix movie which came out just over the holiday season which take this concept and give the power to you to determine the outcome. It's almost like you get to step into the story and be the characters. And of course, half the fun of these books and games is that one can go back, answer differently, and see where this new road takes you. This form of storytelling, I believe, helps to teach the power of choices. It helps our children and us to understand that our decisions have consequences, some good, some bad, some indifferent. Still, it helps us to see the power of choices. For while we may, from time-to-time, be able to go back and change a decision, for the most part we don't get to flip back the pages of life and chose again. We may be able to make new decision that help to rectify a bad or hasty one, but every decision that we make sets us down a new road. A road we choose and a road we follow until we choose the next option.

As we come to celebrate Epiphany today and we hear the story of the Magi once more, I always find myself thinking about the power of choices as we select the road we will follow. Today, we remember how these Wise Men came searching for the Christ Child, and we are often quick to emphasize their gifts and their act of worship when they arrive as they do complete our nativity scene. But in the midst of this glory and wonder – behind the gifts, the praise, and the overwhelming sense of joy that they felt upon seeing Jesus – behind it all, is a choice which they will have to make. For we also remember in the story how King Herod sent the Wise Men to find Jesus and report back to him on his location with the reason, we are told, that Herod simply wants to go and worship him too. But this is far from the truth, for if we keep reading in the Gospel of Matthew, we know the real reason. We know that he had no intention to worship Jesus, but to kill him. After all, people are calling this Jesus the Messiah and Herod likely felt threatened. Herod could see his power slipping away if this prophecy was indeed true and see his reign come to an end if a new ruler was indeed born.

And so, after all the joy of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the Wise Men had a pretty important choice to make – one which would arguable alter the ending of the story. For they had a dream in which they were warned to not go back to Herod. To not tell him where to find Jesus. The details of the dream are not clear – how much was revealed to them in the dream is uncertain. Still, when they rose the next morning, they had a choice to make. Do they go back to Herod as was commanded – as Herod, the authority of the land ordered them to do – or do they do the right and just thing and save the child and return home by another road? Return home by another road and disobey Herod?

They chose another road. Have you ever felt called to follow another road? When faced with a decision, have you ever felt the need to chance your plans, perhaps even in the midst of them, for something else? To make a decision knowing that it will change the ultimate outcome, but making the choice because it feels right, just, or moral? If we

didn't know already, the concept of Choose Your Own Adventure books reminds us, that life is filled with choices. And those choices effect the ending. When we have the option to go one way or another, it will impact the story of our lives. It will affect the lives of those around us too.

So then, the question becomes, how do we make the choice? How do we determine which road to take? For us, it may not come in a vivid dream of warning as it did for the Wise Men. And sure, some choices may be clear from the very beginning, but others will take time, take discernment, take conversations and evaluations, take study, and take prayer to determine which road leads to life. To determine which road will lead to light.

And yes, sometimes knowing that we can't flip back the pages and choose again can be a little terrifying. Still, beloved people of God, what I see in this story of the Magi visiting Jesus is hope and a reminder that we can choose another road for God's good and God's glory. The Magi set out on one road when they left Herod - a road which would take them to Jesus, take them back to Herod, and tell him where the Christ Child was. From that point, we would begin a new story as Herod takes this information to try and get rid of Jesus. A story which I don't really want to hypothesize about the possible endings. But let us remember that the Wise Men were warned in a dream, they realize that they could not go through with the unjust order of Herod and they chose another road - a road to give Jesus a chance at life.

Friends, if we remember one things today may it be this, that there is always another road to take. If we are not happy with the journey. If we feel that we are heading down paths of strife and trouble, we can always return home by another road. We can always choose a new road which leads back to light and life. Which follows the path of God's love, righteousness, and justice. Again I say, we can always return home by another road. And this is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen.