

***The Epiphany of the Lord***  
***Homily ~ January 8, 2012***

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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 too hard to find a seat on our celebration of the Twelfth Day of Christmas. The crowds have gone home, but like Wise Men from the East, we have come to worship Christ the Newborn 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 suggest we focus on today: *"And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their country by another way."*

What would it mean for you and me to take a new road home in 2012?

I. 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? 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 old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions..."*

What hopes and dreams dance in your head? What thoughts of a divine kind float through your mind? Maybe hoping for things that never were is more helpful for the future than lamenting over things that never have been. Of course, our hopes and our dreams must be interpreted. They must be tried and tested by God's word. They must also be placed along side 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 some 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.
- God is at work for good in all things.

## II. Consider the road of moral integrity.

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

I recently saw “The Nativity Story.” It was actually a well-done movie about the birth of Christ. It was a little disturbing that the movie opened with Herod’s Slaughter of the Innocents. At first, the viewer is not ready for that. Couldn’t we 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 must we.

At the gate of a new year, we could pray, “Good Lord, deliver us from pack thinking.” In other words, 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 Holy 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.”*

Here at the gate of a new year, we must decide—will we just talk the talk or will we walk the walk? Integrity is kind of like the weather—everybody talks about it but not many people do anything about it.

What is integrity? Long-term good taking charge of short-term desire. Business ethics under the pressure of making a living. Believing goodness to be worth it when it appears otherwise.

### III. Consider the road of dynamic faith.

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

They returned to their country on the road less traveled, without the benefit of a road map or, for that matter, even a road. There wasn't a 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. The righteous live by faith.

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 does not always equal two in the math of life. We do not always reap what we sow.

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 into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than any known way.” So I go on 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 departed for their country by another way.”*

So friends, fellow companions, on the threshold of this brand new year, I invite you to join me and the Lord Jesus to take the road less traveled, to walk with him and one another—it could make all the difference in the world.

